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THE TV SMASH HIT SERIES

# M*A*S*H GOES TO MOSCOW

and war goes to pieces in Red Square!

Richard Hooker and William E. Butterworth

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M*A*S*H Goes to Texas (V2)
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THE CHAIRMAN:

“This is your beloved Chairman) of the Supreme Soviet…. Who the hell, are you?”

JIM-BOY:

“Come on in, Mr. Ambassador, Sit down and have a boiled peanut.”

SHUR-LEE:

“Hi, there. I’m Shur-lee Strydent, and I’m here to make you adore me.”

DIRTY GERTY RUMPLEMAYER:

“I’ll tell that fat cop over there that you offered me a Hershey Bar and a dime to play show-and-tell.”

SEAN O’CASEY O’MULLIGAN:

“Gadzooks, Birdwell. Get our friend down from the chandelier.”

They’ll all be hanging from the Kremlin chandeliers—before Moscow gets used to M*A*S*H

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M*A*S*H Goes to Moscow

Further misadventures of M*A*S*H

Richard Hooker

And

William E. Butterworth

Pocket Book edition published September, 1977

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In fond memory of Malcolm Reiss, gentleman literary agent
June 3, 1905—December 17, 1975
—Richard Hooker and W. E. Butterworth

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## *Chapter One*

The Commissar of Culture of the Supreme Soviet of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Comrade Vladimir Ivanovich Vladimirovich, who, after all, had been around a long time, knew that he was in trouble from the moment the red telephone on his desk had rung.

The red telephone was restricted to communications of the highest importance between officials of the highest authority. He had been Commissar of Culture for three full years before he had dared to even hint that he would like to have a red telephone, and it had been three more years before one had finally been installed on his desk. In the two years that it had been on his desk, a symbol of his importance to the Supreme Soviet, it had rung but twice, and both times it had been a wrong number.

Ten minutes before, it had rung for the third time. He had grabbed it on the first ring.

"Office of the Commissar of Culture, Commissar V. I. Vladimirovich speaking," he had said.

"Comrade, this is Comrade Katherine Popowski," his caller had said.

"Who?"

"Comrade Popowski. Personal Private Executive Secretary to the Chairman."

"What can I do for you, Comrade Personal Private Executive Secretary Popowski?"

"The Chairman has asked me to give you a message, comrade," Comrade Popowski said. "He said to tell you that he would be ever so grateful if you could tear yourself away from whatever important affairs of culture you're working on to give him a few minutes of your valuable time."

"I see," Comrade Vladimirovich said. "Well, let me check my schedule."

"And he said if you're not here in ten minutes, he will look forward to your postcards from Umguuluk and other points of interest in Siberia,"

Comrade Popowski said. “May I tell the Chairman that he may expect you?”

“Comrade, I’m on my way,” Comrade Vladimirovich replied, reaching for his shoes even as he replaced the red telephone in its cradle.

“Tanya!” he screamed (the intercom was, again, not working). “Have my car brought around immediately! The Chairman himself wishes to confer with me on important matters of state.”

“But,” Comrade Tanya, the Commissar’s private personal executive secretary replied, somewhat petulantly, “you said we were going to the Japanese embassy. You know how I love sukiyaki, and you promised, you know you did!”

“Tanya, baby,” the Commissar replied, “it’s out of my hands!”

“That’s all I ever hear—‘It’s out of my hands,’ ” Tanya snapped. “Sometimes I wish I were still back at the tractor factory.”

“I’ll make it up to you, my little cabbage,” Commissar Vladimirovich said. “A little present…”

“Huh!” Tanya snorted.

“Maybe a little trip to the Black Sea?” he offered.

“If you really loved me,” Tanya said, “you’d get me a Ford. Lots of the other private personal executive secretaries have got Fords. Natasha Goldfarb’s commissar got her a *Buick.* And all I have is a lousy little workers’ and peasants’ model Fiat.”

“I’ll do what I can, Tanya,” the Commissar said. “Now wish me luck.”

“What’s the Chairman want, anyway?” she said, petulantly averting her face as the Commissar tried to give her a comradely little kiss.

“I wish I knew,” the Commissar said.

Fifty seconds before the ten-minute deadline had expired, Commissar Vladimirovich, somewhat out of breath after a 500-yard dash down the marble halls of the Kremlin, stood wheezing in front of Comrade Popowski’s desk.

“Comrade Popowski, I presume?” he said. “Commissar Vladimirovich to see the Chairman.”

“Boy, are you going to get it!” Comrade Popowski said. “Go right in!”

Commissar Vladimirovich pushed open half of the double door leading to the Chairman’s office.

“You wanted to see me, Comrade Chairman?” he asked, sticking his head in the door.

“Come in, comrade,” the Chairman said, fixing a smile on his face, getting to his feet, waving Comrade Vladimirovich into a chair.

“Nice to see you,” the Chairman said. “I don’t get to see very much of you, do I?”

“Not very much, Comrade Chairman,” the Commissar agreed.

The Chairman pushed a switch on his intercom. “No calls, Katherine,” he said. There was no response. “No calls, Katherine,” he repeated, and then, “Katherine? Katherine? Testing, one two three four.” Then he said a naughty word, got to his feet, and marched to the door. He opened it. “No calls, Katherine,” he said. “And call the Commissar of Communications and tell him if he can’t fix this damned intercom once and for all, I’ll send him back to Ulan Bator!”

Then he turned around, putting the smile back on his face.

“Little problem with the intercom,” he explained.

“I have the same problem, comrade,” the Commissar said, delighted that they had something in common.

“But you’re just the lousy Commissar of Culture, and *I’m* the Chairman,” the Chairman said. “There’s a difference, comrade, and don’t you ever forget it!”

“I agree completely, Comrade Chairman.”

“How about a little belt, comrade?” the Chairman asked. “To chase the chill?”

“That’s very kind of you, Comrade Chairman,” the Commissar said.

“I can offer you a little workers’ and peasants’ vodka,” the Chairman said, opening a cabinet. “A little People’s Democratic Republic of Hungary Slivovitz, or—and I wouldn’t want this to get around, of course—some very nice Old White Stagg Kentucky bourbon whiskey. I have the ambassador in Washington send me a couple of bottles in the diplomatic pouch every once in a while.”

“I’ll have the Old White Stagg, please, Comrade Chairman.”

“Say what you like about those lousy Americans,” the Chairman said, pouring three inches of Old White Stagg into water glasses, “they really know how to make booze.”

“You’re absolutely right, Comrade Chairman,” the Commissar said.

“Of course I am, that’s why I’m the Chairman,” the Chairman said. “Well, Vladimir Ivanovich, here’s mud in your eye!” He tipped up the glass and drank deeply.

“Mud in *your* eye,” Commissar Vladimirovich said.

“Watch it, comrade!” the Chairman said. “You’re talking to your Chairman, you know!”

“No offense, Comrade Chairman.”

“Tell me, Vladimir Ivanovich, you like your job?” the Chairman asked.

“Oh, yes, Comrade Chairman. I take great pride in the service I am permitted to render to the Soviet people in my duty.”

“Aside from that, you like it? I mean, is your car all right?”

“I’m perfectly happy with my Cadillac, Comrade Chairman. I realize fully that we have to conserve our hard currency for important affairs of state, and that only you, Comrade Chairman, really need a Rolls-Royce.”

“Just between you and me, Vladimir Ivanovich, I’m not so sure the Rolls was such a good idea. You have any idea how hard it is to find parts for a Rolls in Moscow? And don’t you ever believe they don’t break down. I could tell you stories … but I’m getting off the subject.”

“Yes, Comrade Chairman?”

“You like your apartment? Your dacha in the country?”

“Oh, yes, Comrade Chairman.”

“And, just between you and me and the lamp pole, Vladimir Ivanovich, you get along all right with your private personal executive secretary?”

“To tell you the truth, Comrade Chairman, she’s been after me to get her a Ford,” the Commissar replied. “She says all the other girls have Fords, and that Commissar Smersk got his … you know who I mean, Natasha Goldfarb, the one with the big …”

“I know the comrade,” the Chairman said. He winked.

“Well, Natasha’s got a Buick.”

“Comrade Smersk came to me personally about that,” the Chairman said. “Man to Chairman, so to speak. I listened to his problem, I sympathized with him, I told him to go ahead, get her a Buick. If that’s what it took to keep her happy, which meant that he would be happy, and could do a good job, the U.S.S.R. could afford it.”

“That was very understanding of you, Comrade Chairman.”

“I know,” the Chairman said. “And I’m preparing to do that same thing for you, Vladimir Ivanovich.”

“I was thinking along the lines of a Mustang,” the Commissar said. “I mean, she really doesn’t need a Thunderbird …”

“You’re not listening to me, comrade,” the Chairman said, with just a touch of menace in his voice. “At least not carefully. You didn’t hear what I said about Smersk doing a good job. The way it works is *first* you do a good job, and then you can get your Tanya a Mustang. Maybe, in your case, a Pinto would be more appropriate, but in any event, *first* you do a good job. Am I getting through to you, Vladimir Ivanovich?”

“Am I to infer, Comrade Chairman, that … uh … there is … uh … some question about how well I am performing my duties?”

“You got it, Vladimir,” the Chairman said.

“I don’t suppose I could have another little belt of that capitalistic booze, could I?”

“Why not?” the Chairman said. “Just don’t make a pig of yourself.”

Commissar Vladimirovich took a moment to gather his thoughts.

“What exactly have I done wrong, Comrade Chairman?” he asked, finally.

“Let me put it to you this way, comrade,” the Chairman said. “I’m a busy man, you agree?”

“Oh, yes, Comrade Chairman, I agree.”

“And a busy man like me, an important man like me, should be devoting his time and effort to important things, right?”

“Oh, yes, Comrade Chairman.”

“Like the Chinese problem and things like that, right?”

“Absolutely, Comrade Chairman.”

“I mean, Vladimir, if I’m worrying about other things, who’s to mind the store? You get my meaning?”

“I get your meaning, Comrade.”

“A man in a position like mine, Vladimir—he just can’t afford complaints from home, you understand?”

“I understand.”

“And the situation really gets out of control when I get it not only at home, but from Comrade Katherine. I mean, what’s the point in having a

private personal executive Chairman's secretary if all you get from her is bitch, bitch, bitch, just like you get at home? You know what I mean?"

"I think so. Am I correct in inferring that you, Comrade Chairman, are hearing complaints about me, something I have done, from both your charming wife, Mrs. Comrade Chairman, and from Comrade Popowski, too?"

"That's the bottom line, Vladimir Ivanovich," the Chairman said. "That's why I asked you in here for this little chat."

"May I ask what the complaints are specifically, Comrade Chairman?"

"I wondered when you would," the Chairman said. "I'll give it to you in three-little words: Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov."

"Oh," the Commissar of Culture said.

"Is that all you've got to say? I tell you that my wife and Comrade Popowski between them are driving me crazy twenty-four hours a day, that I have hardly thirty seconds a week to worry about the Chinese problem and the Cubans and everything else, and all you've got to say is 'oh'?"

"The problem of Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov is a delicate one, Comrade Chairman."

"Delicate, schmelicate," the Chairman said. "With all the cultural resources of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics at your disposal, you're telling me that you've got a *delicate* problem with this singer?"

"Forgive me, Comrade Chairman," the Commissar said. "But one cannot really accurately describe Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov as 'this singer.' "

"Why not?" the Chairman asked. "What's so special about him?"

"I believe you are aware, Comrade Chairman, that on his first visit to the Bolshoi Theatre Opera, several years ago, he was given a medal?"

"Which one?"

"Hero of Soviet Labor, First Class," the Commissar said.

"For singing?" the Chairman asked, incredulously.

"Not exactly," the Commissar said, blushing.

"Far be it from someone in my position, Vladimir Ivanovich, to listen to nasty rumors," the Chairman said. "Especially nasty rumors concerning those beautiful young women of the Bolshoi Theatre Corps de Ballet—fantastic rumors, actually, ones which stagger the imagination. I'm sure you can put them to rest for me."

The Commissar of Culture lowered his head and said nothing.

"I'm a man of the world, Vladimir Ivariovich," the Chairman said, after a long moment. "You don't get to be Chairman—or, more important, to stay Chairman—unless you're a man of the world. I am—reluctantly, of course—willing to accept it, as one of those things that happen from time to time, that this 'singer,' shall we say, came to know rather well one of the ballerinas …" He looked at the Commissar of Culture.

The Commissar of Culture, not able to meet the Chairman's gaze, shook his head slowly and sadly from side to side.

"Then two ballerinas," the Chairman said. "I'm a sophisticated man. I'm willing to accept that. In my youth, as a matter of fact … well, there's no need to get into that. That's it. Two ballerinas who put aside their high Soviet moral principles in a moment of uncontrolled passion?"

The Commissar of Culture continued to shake his head slowly and sadly from side to side.

"You tell me, then, Vladimir Ivanovich," the Chairman said. "Three ballerinas? Four ballerinas?" The Commissar's head continued to shake.

"Five ballerinas? Six ballerinas? Twenty ballerinas? The entire Corps de Ballet? *All* of them?" the Chairman finally asked.

"All of the females over sixteen," the Commissar finally said.

"*All* of them?" the Chairman asked. "All thirty-six?"

The Commissar's head, which had been shaking from side to side, now started nodding up and down.

"How long did it take him?"

"He was here ten days," the Commissar said. "Five days here and five days in Leningrad. By the time he left Leningrad, he was working his way around again. The girls drew lots to see who would get seconds."

"And for this we gave him a medal?" the Chairman asked.

"The girls insisted," the Commissar said. "They didn't want him to leave. They threatened to go on strike unless we offered him his citizenship back and an appointment as an Honored Artist of the Soviet Union."

"He's French, I understand?"

"No, he's an American."

"But he normally sings at the Paris Opera," the Chairman said. "And how can anybody with a name like Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov be an American?"

"He was born there, Comrade Chairman."

“Let that pass for a minute, Vladimir,” the Chairman said. He looked thoughtful for a moment, then reached for the bottle of Old White Stagg. He raised the bottle to his lips and drank deeply.

“Comrade Vladimirovich,” he began. “Vladimir. We have let our hair down this far, so let us continue to speak frankly. What we say here will stay here, if you get my meaning.”

“Of course, Comrade Chairman,” the Commissar said. “For reasons I don’t really understand, my wife is very anxious to hear this singer sing *Boris Godnuov.”*

“I see,” the Commissar of Culture said.

“And Comrade Katherine wants to hear him sing *Boris Godnuov,”* the Chairman said.

“I was afraid it might be something like that,” the Commissar of Culture said.

“My peace of mind, comrade, is of great importance to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, you agree?”

“Of course, Comrade Chairman.”

“I mean, how am I going to have time to think about the Chinese problem, and the Cuban problem, and the rest of it if my peace of mind has been disturbed?”

“You’re absolutely right, Comrade Chairman.”

“Then maybe you can explain this, Vladimir Vladimirovich?” the Chairman said, slipping a sheet of yellow paper, Kremlin Form 344-A, Inter-Commissar Memoranda, across the table to the Commissar of Culture. The Commissar picked it up, although he knew its contents by heart, and read it.

“What does it say, Vladimir Vladimirovich?” the Chairman said, his voice soft but menacing. “Read it to me.”

The Commissar of Culture cleared his voice. “It says,” he said, “ ‘Regarding the Chairman’s Kremlin Form 344-A, subject: Opera Singer’s Singing, that the Commissar of Culture regrets to inform the Chairman that the singer in question, Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov, will not be available to sing in the Soviet Union at any time in the foreseeable future.’ ” He paused, swallowed, and went on. “It is signed, ‘Respectfully submitted, V. I. Vladimirovich, Commissar of Culture.’ ”

“So it is,” the Chairman said. “*Commissar of Culture.* Maybe you’re in the wrong job, Vladimir. How does Deputy Assistant Junior Commissar

in charge of cutting fishing holes through the ice in Lake Baikal sound to you, Vladimir?"

"Comrade Chairman …" Vladimir began.

"I'm not an unreasonable man, Vladimir Ivanovich Vladimirovich," the Chairman said. "I regard myself as just one of the workers and peasants, and the last thing I expect in the world is special privilege just because I happen to be Supreme Chairman of the Party. You understand that, don't you, Vladimir?"

"Yes, of course, Comrade Chairman."

"On the other hand, Vladimir," the Chairman went on. "Let's face it, I'm not what you can call one of your ordinary run-of-the-mill workers and peasants. Right?"

"Absolutely, Comrade Chairman," the Commissar of Culture replied.

"And when I ask a teensy-weensy little favor from one of my commissars, I don't think I'm being unreasonable to expect to get what I ask for, do you, Comrade?"

"Not unreasonable at all, Comrade Chairman," the Commissar said.

"And I don't think that asking the Commissar of Culture to arrange for two performances of *Boris Godnuov* at the Bolshoi is too much to ask of a Commissar of Culture, do you, Comrade Commissar of Culture? I mean, after all, that's what you're for, when you get right down to it, isn't it, Comrade?"

"Absolutely, Comrade Chairman."

"Then why did you send me this Form 344-A saying you won't do it?"

"I didn't say I won't do it, Comrade Chairman," the Commissar of Culture said. "I said Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov said he won't do it."

"Perhaps Tovarisch Korsky-Rimsakov wasn't aware that I, personally, was interested," the Chairman said. "Let's face it, Vladimir, you're the kind of commissar people like saying no to. Personality-wise, comrade, you're a zero."

"I personally told him, Comrade Chairman, that you were personally interested," the Commissar of Culture said.

"And he still refused? What did he say?" the Chairman asked, incredulously.

The Commissar of Culture was visibly embarrassed.

"What did he say, comrade?" the Chairman asked, sternly.

"I hesitate to say it out loud," the Commissar of Culture said.

"Well, then," the Chairman said, "whisper it in my ear."

The Commissar of Culture rose, walked behind the Chairman's desk, bent over, and whispered Mr. Korsky-Rimsakov's reply in the Chairman's ear. The Chairman blanched.

"Not only," he said, "is that not the sort of language one should use in the same sentence as my name, but, physiologically and anatomically speaking, it's impossible."

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## *Chapter Two*

The Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. listened intently and took notes as the Commissar of Culture explained what, precisely, was the problem vis-à-vis having Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov give two performances of *Boris Godnuov* at the Bolshoi Theatre.

When the Commissar of Culture had concluded his explanation, the Chairman looked thoughtful a moment and then said, “Well, Comrade Commissar, that’s it. So far as I’m concerned, you’ve done all that could be expected of someone with your rather limited mental ability. And, comrade, just between you and me, it will be a cold day in hell when someone who would say that about me will sing in one of my workers’ and peasants’ opera houses. He needs his mouth washed out with soap, that’s what should happen.”

“I very much appreciate your understanding, Comrade Chairman,” the Commissar of Culture said. “Will there be anything else?”

“Thanks for stopping in, Vladimir Vladimirovich,” the Chairman said.

“About the Mustang for my private personal executive secretary?” the Commissar of Culture said.

“Don’t press your luck, comrade,” the Chairman said. *“Auf Wiedersehen!”*

As soon as the Commissar of Culture had closed the door behind him, the Chairman flicked the switch on his intercom. Then he said a naughty word and walked to the door.

“Katherine,” he said. “My little cabbage. Would you get my wife on the phone, please?”

“Poopsie,” Comrade Katherine Popowski asked. “What did he say?”

“You weren’t eavesdropping?” the Chairman asked.

“I had to go down the hall a minute,” Katherine replied. “Anyway, the intercom’s not working.”

“Speaking of which, what did the Commissar of Communications say about getting it fixed?”

Comrade Popowski snapped her fingers, a gesture of frustration. “I just *knew* there was something I was supposed to do.”

“Well, do it just as soon as you finish getting my wife on the line.”

“You don’t have to snap at me, Poopsie,” Comrade Katherine said. “And you didn’t answer my question.”

“Eavesdrop when I talk to my wife,” the Chairman said.

“I wouldn’t miss it for the world, poopsie,” Katherine said.

The Chairman walked back into his office and sat down at his desk, waiting for the telephone to ring. When it did, he grabbed it on the first ring.

“I hope I didn’t interrupt anything, darling,” he cooed. There was a reply, and then he snapped, “This is your beloved Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, that’s who it is. Who the hell are you?”

There was another pause.

“Who was that man, Olga? And what’s he doing answering the telephone in my bedroom? All right, *our* bedroom. Who is he?”

“Anatol the Hairdresser,” Mrs. Chairman replied.

“Anatol the Hairdresser?”

“Anatol says that Cher Boris would just love me if I wore a traditional pompadour,” Mrs. Chairman said.

“Cher Boris?” the Chairman asked. “Who the hell is Cher Boris?”

“Oh, my God, Sergei, your ignorance is showing again! Cher Boris is what we opera lovers call Maestro Korsky-Rimsakov. I should think that even *you* would know that much.”

“Of course I do. It just slipped my mind for the moment.”

“I suppose you’re calling me to tell me there’s good news,” she said, somewhat coyly.

“Well, the truth of the matter is, Olga,” the Chairman said, “I have just had a long talk with the Commissar of Culture.”

“And?” Mrs. Chairman replied, suspicion and menace mingling in her voice.

“There are, I’m afraid, certain problems I didn’t know about,” the Chairman said.

“Sergei,” Mrs. Chairman said. “You are not trying to lead up to telling me that Cher Boris is not coming back?”

“Olga,” the Chairman said. “My little cabbage.”

“Don’t start with that little cabbage business, Sergei,” Mrs. Chairman said. “Just tell me when he’s coming so that Anatol will have all the time he needs to do my hair.”

“There are some small problems, Olga, to tell you the truth.”

“But you’re the Chairman, stupid,” Olga replied. “What kind of problems could there possibly be?”

“Well, for one thing, the Bolshoi Theatre used to belong to his Uncle Sergei,” the Chairman said.

“Cher Boris’s Uncle Sergei?”

“Yes, my little cabbage. He was the Grand Duke Sergei Korsky-Rimsakov.”

“Cher Boris,” Mrs. Chairman said, rather dreamily, “does have a certain aristocratic air about him, now that I think about it.”

“And he wants it back,” the Chairman said.

“Who wants what back?”

“This singer wants the Bolshoi Theatre back. He says it was stolen from his family during the revolution, and now he wants it back.”

“Well, give it to him,” she said. “It’s little enough to ask, seems to me.”

“Olga, how would it look if it got out that the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, guardian of the property of the workers and peasants, had given away the Bolshoi Theatre?”

“Keep it quiet,” she said. “Who has to know?”

“It’s not only that,” the Chairman said. “He wants fifty years’ back rent, with interest.”

“That sounds fair,” Olga said.

“It’s absolutely out of the question,” the Chairman said. “I can’t do it.”

“I’ve given you the best years of my life, Sergei,” Olga said. “God alone knows what I’ve put up with you. And when I ask for one little teensy-weensy thing, all I get is excuses.”

“Olga, what do you expect me to do?” the Chairman asked, desperately. “You wouldn’t believe what this singer of yours told the Commissar of Culture to tell me.”

“I’d love to know!” Olga said, and the Chairman was momentarily so angry and frustrated that he told her.

Mrs. Chairman giggled. “Oh, isn’t that *naughty!”* she said. “I’ll bet that’s the first time anyone ever said that to you, isn’t it, Sergei?”

“The first and the last time,” the Chairman said firmly.

“Let me put it this way, Sergei,” Mrs. Chairman said. “You’re always telling me how important you are, that you’re *Numero Uno* around here. This is your chance to prove it.”

“Olga, there is no way I can give him the Bolshoi Theatre and fifty years’ back rent!”

“I’m sure you’ll think of something else, then,” Mrs. Chairman said. “I’ve got my heart set on this, Sergei, and you know what that means!”

The telephone went dead in his ear. The Chairman said another naughty word and was somewhat startled when there was a reply.

“Excuse me, Comrade Chairman?” said a rather plump gentleman in a gray suit, bearing seven identical medals, each in the shape of a red star.

“Who the hell are you?”

“Comrade Alexis Alexovich Posnopowitz, Comrade Chairman.”

“And what the hell do you mean, busting into my office?”

“I am here to fix the intercom, Comrade Chairman.”

“To hell with that,” the Chairman said. “Get me the Paris Opera on the phone.”

“The Paris Opera? The Paris in France—that opera?”

“You got it, comrade, now get it.”

“Excuse me, Comrade Chairman, but you need permission to make an international long-distance call.”

“Permission? From whom do I need permission?”

“From your supervisor.”

“I don’t have a supervisor, you moron, I’m the Chairman.”

“Well, I guess you don’t get to call Paris, then, Comrade Chairman. Rules is rules.”

“Katherine!” the Chairman bellowed. He had to bellow it three times before Comrade Popowski appeared, visibly sulking, in the doorway.

“Something for you, comrade?” she asked coldly, disinterestedly.

“Something the matter, my little cabbage?” the Chairman, confused, asked.

“It’s Comrade Popowski to you, comrade,” she said. “And that isn’t all that’s changed in the last couple of minutes, if you get my meaning, I’ve got my heart set on Cher Boris, too. And you know what that means!”

“Let’s not be hasty, Katherine,” the Chairman said. “What I called you for was to give you permission to put in a call to this Korsky-Rimsakov character in Paris.”

“*Maestro* Korsky-Rimsakov to someone like you, tubby,” Comrade Popowski said. “*Cher Boris* to his devoted fans.”

“Whatever,” the Chairman said. “You have my permission to get him on the phone.”

“Why don’t you get him on the phone yourself?” Comrade Popowski asked.

“According to this simpleton,” the Chairman said, gesturing toward the Commissar of Communications, “I need permission from my supervisor.”

“You don’t have a supervisor,” she replied.

“But you do!” the Chairman screamed, taking off his shoe and beating it on his desk. “Now get me Cher Boris, or whatever you call him, on the phone!”

It took about thirty minutes to reach the Paris Opera, and another thirty minutes to get Maestro Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov to the telephone. The conversation itself lasted about fifteen seconds. The Chairman, having had an hour to get control of himself, was at his most charming.

“Maestro Korsky-Rimsakov,” he oozed. “So good of you to spare me a moment of your time. This is the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, calling all the way from Moscow …” Then his face took on a stunned look. “I’ll be damned,” he said, as he sat the telephone back in its cradle. “He said it again.”

“Said what again?” the Commissar of Communications asked. Comrade Popowski walked over to him and whispered in his ear. The Commissar of Communications, who was already possessed of a somewhat ruddy complexion, turned tomato red. “He said *that* to the Chairman? But you just can’t say things like that to the Chairman!”

“*Cher Boris* can,” Comrade Popowski said. “Cher Boris can do anything he wants to do! And you should have heard his voice! Such diction! Such well-rounded syllables! Such timbre!”

The Chairman, his face pale, extended the index finger of his left hand and moved it slowly to a button mounted atop his desk. After a moment’s hesitation, he exhaled deeply and then pushed it.

Immediately, bells throughout the Kremlin began to ring. Within moments, the Supreme Executive Committee of the Supreme Soviet (that is to say, the Commissar of Secret Police, the Commissar of Foreign Affairs, the Chairman of the Soviet Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Commissar of Feminine Affairs) rushed into the office.

"Is it war, Comrade Chairman?" the Chairman of the Soviet Joint Chiefs of Staff asked.

"Worse," the Chairman said.

"The Americans have shut off our credit?" the Commissar of Foreign Affairs asked.

"Worse than that, too," the Chairman said.

"What can be worse than that?" the Commissar of Secret Police asked.

"You won't believe what someone told your beloved Chairman," the Chairman said. "Once via the Commissar of Culture and once, just now, in person." He then told them what Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov had told him.

"Who said that?" the Commissar of Feminine Affairs asked, blushing rather prettily for someone of her bulk and formidable appearance. "That's not only disgusting, but so far as I know a physiological impossibility."

"Cher Boris said it," Comrade Popowski said.

"Cher Boris?" the Commissar of Feminine Affairs said, her blush replaced by something like an adoring glow. "Isn't he the little cut-up?"

"And you should have heard his voice," Comrade Popowski said. "The timbre, the bell-like tones, the exquisite diction."

"You heard it, comrade?" the Commissar of the Feminine Affairs said.

"Every sibilant syllable," Comrade Popowski replied. "Every thrilling vowel and consonant. I'll remember it to my dying day."

"I suppose it's too much to hope that you taped it?" the Commissar of Feminine Affairs said.

"Cher Boris who?" the Chairman of the Soviet Joint Chiefs of Staff demanded.

"What can you expect from a man?" the Commissar of Feminine Affairs said acidly. "Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov, the world's greatest opera singer, you cultureless oaf, that's who!"

The Chairman of the Soviet Joint Chiefs of Staff took on a startled look. “I thought I’d heard that name somewhere,” he said. He took a leather notebook from his pocket and consulted it. “That’s it,” he said. “Comrade Chairman, this may not be exactly the right moment to bring this up, but before I came to work this morning the little woman …”

The Commissar of Secret Police snickered.

“Watch it, Dimitri,” the Chairman of the Soviet Joint Chiefs of Staff snapped. “Your Sonya isn’t exactly what you could call a wood nymph either. Anyway, my wife said I was to make a point of seeing you, Comrade Chairman, to make sure she had a box for any performance of this guy, what’s-his-name, singing.”

*“What’s-his-name! What’s-his-name!”* the Commissar of Feminine Affairs shrieked. That’s going too far!”

“What’s-his-name isn’t going to sing,” the Chairman said.

“What do you mean he’s not going to sing?” the Commissar of Secret Police said.

“What’s it to you, Four Eyes,” the Commissar of Feminine Affairs asked, “whether or not he sings?”

“As a matter of fact,” the Commissar of Secret Police said, somewhat lamely, “just before I left for the office this morning, my wife, my sister-in-law, and all four daughters made me promise that I would have a word with Comrade Chairman here to make double sure they would have seats in the front row for any and all performances.”

“That’s nice,” the Commissar of Foreign Relations said. “That way they can sit with my wife and mother-in-law.”

“Didn’t you guys hear what I said? What I said he said?” the Chairman shouted. “Don’t tell me you’re standing there telling me that you would permit someone who told your beloved Chairman what What’s-his-name told me … ”

“There he goes again!” Comrade Popowski shouted. “We’re through, tubby! The only little cabbage you’re going to get from now on will be in cole slaw!”

“To sing in the Bolshoi Theatre?” the Chairman concluded.

If he had expected a ringing reply, he was to be disappointed. Not only was there not a ringing denunciation of someone who would suggest (to his face) that the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet attempt a biologically

impossible act of self-reproduction, but from the look on the Commissar of Foreign Relations' face, he knew he was about to be defied.

"Now, Comrade Chairman," the Commissar of Foreign Relations said, "let's not make too hasty a judgment…"

"We all know," the Chairman of the Soviet Joint Chiefs of Staff chimed in, "that we all say things we really don't mean from time to time."

"Forgive and forget, as I always say," the Commissar of Secret Police said. "None of us is perfect."

"I, for one," the Commissar of Feminine Affairs cooed, "am sure that if *Cher Boris* really said something like that, you must have said something that annoyed him."

"The reason he's annoyed," the Chairman said, "is because the Commissar of Culture told him he couldn't have the Bolshoi Theatre and fifty years' back rent—that's why he's mad."

"Leave it to Old Blubberbelly to put his foot in his mouth," the Commissar of Feminine Affairs said. "*I* say that if Cher Boris wants that old theater, give it to him!"

"After all, Comrade Chairman," the Commissar of Foreign Relations said, "it's only money. We can probably borrow it from the Americans."

"Let's consider this philosophically," the Commissar of Secret Police said. "What one word would describe a man who displays such a callous indifference to the happy home lives of the members of the Supreme Executive Committee of the Supreme Soviet?"

"The one thing we need now, Four Eyes," the Commissar of Feminine Affairs said, "is action, not philosophy."

"Let him talk, comrade," the Chairman said. "You tell me, comrade, what word comes to your mind?"

"Scoundrel," the Commissar of Secret Police said smugly.

"O.K.," the Chairman said. "He's a scoundrel."

"Bite your tongue!" Comrade Katherine Popowski said. "Well, perhaps a *delightful* scoundrel," the Commissar of Feminine Affairs said.

"Scoundrel, schmoundrel," the Chairman of the Soviet Joint Chiefs of Staff said. "Get to the point, comrade."

"And what is the last refuge of a scoundrel?" the Commissar of Secret Police asked, just as smugly.

"Beats me," the Chairman said! "Will you get to the bottom line?"

“I think my distinguished colleague is on to something,” the Commissar of Foreign Affairs said.

“The last refuge of a scoundrel is patriotism,” the Commissar of Secret Police said. “We’ll get to him through his patriotism.”

“His *patriotism?”* the Chairman barked. “I *told* you what he said to me! How can you be patriotic and say something like that to your beloved Chairman?”

“I believe, Comrade Chairman,” the Commissar of Foreign Relations said, “that what my distinguished colleague is suggesting is that we appeal to What’s-his-name’s patriotism to the United States.”

“You’ve got it, Oscar,” the Commissar of Secret Police said. “We get to him through Washington.”

There was a moment’s silence as the idea was considered by all present. Finally, the Chairman spoke.

“Why not?” he said. “God knows, the Americans believe anything we tell them. I’ll tell you what I’m going to do. You, Comrade Chairman of the Soviet Joint Chiefs of Staff—you start moving some divisions around in East Germany and Poland. Make sure you make a lot of noise.”

“Immediately, Comrade Chairman,” the Chairman of the Soviet Joint Chiefs of Staff said.

“And you, Comrade Commissar of Feminine Affairs, you mobilize some East German women and have them start throwing rocks over the Berlin Wall.”

“Every time we do that, let the East German women get close to the Berlin Wall, Comrade Chairman, we lose some,” the Commissar of Feminine Affairs said. “They—excuse the expression—defect.”

“Well, make sure they don’t!” the Chairman snapped. “Put some tanks between them and the wall. Do what you have to, but make some noise at the wall. You understand me?”

“Perfectly, Comrade Chairman,” she said.

“And you, Comrade Commissar of Foreign Relations —you get on a plane and get to the United Nations. Give them a speech, no holds barred, a real spellbinder. You might try banging your shoe on the desk. When Old Khrushchev did that, it worked like a charm!”

“I understand perfectly, Comrade Chairman,” the Commissar of Foreign Relations said.

“And you, Comrade Commissar of the Secret Police—you let it leak right away that we’re really angry, but willing to negotiate. Pass it through the Swedes. They’re always willing to cooperate.”

“I’ll get right on it, Comrade Chairman.”

“Then Old Walnut …” the Chairman began.

“Excuse me, Comrade Chairman,” the Commissar of Foreign Relations said, “that’s Old Peanut.”

“Peanut, Walnut—whatever. Anyway, he’ll ask you down to the White House to see what’s bothering us. Keep him dangling awhile, of course, and then tell him. He’ll be so relieved that he’ll let us have this What’s-his- name for as long as we like, and there will be none of this giving back the Bolshoi Theatre nonsense, either.”

“Comrade Chairman,” the Commissar of Feminine Affairs said, “you’re a genius!”

“I know, I know,” he said, smiling at all of them.

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## *Chapter Three*

The subject of the emergency conference of the Supreme Executive Committee of the Supreme Soviet, Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov, dressed in the costume in which he was about to sing the role of Don Carlo in a *matinee magnifique** of Verdi's *La forza del destino* (The Force of Destiny) at the French National Opera House, set the telephone down in his dressing room and turned to his close companion, His Royal Highness Sheikh Hassan ad Kayam.

*(* There are two interrelated differences between a matinee magnifique and a matinee ordinaire at the French National Opera, Paris. Whenever Maestro Korsky-Rimsakov sings, the production is considered to be a matinee magnifique. And whenever there is a matinee magnifique, there is a 100 percent matinee magnifique surcharge on ticket prices.)*

"Say what you like about them, Hassan," he said. "They're tenacious! They never give up!"

"Perhaps, Maestro," His Royal Highness said, "you should consider giving them the priceless gift of your art for just one performance."

"I can see right through you, you oversexed camel jockey," the maestro snapped. "You just want another crack at my rejects from the Corps de Ballet. Shame on you!"The arrow struck home. His Royal Highness, who stood five-feet, two inches tall and four feet even around, lowered his head and blushed. Prince Hassan, heir apparent to the throne of the sheikhdom of Hussid and currently Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of His Most Islamic Majesty to the Fourth French Republic, had some years before become aware that the female discards of the maestro were of an infinitely higher quality, not to mention variety, than the females he could attract, even though it was common knowledge that his personal income ran to some $30,000 daily.

This is not to say this was the only reason His Royal Highness had become, as some called him, "First Among the Maestro's Groupies," although it had a good deal to do with it. His Royal Highness was, in fact, the maestro's most devoted fan. His admiration of the maestro's voice was

both genuine and knowledgeable. He alone was permitted to criticize the maestro's performances.*

*(* The maestro, as he himself admitted, was incapable of actually singing badly. What HRH Prince Hassan was permitted to judge was whether a performance was up to the maestro's usual perfection or merely superb.)*

What, exactly, Maestro Korsky-Rimsakov saw in His Royal Highness, on the other hand, was rather puzzling. The singer's detractors suggested, rather unkindly, that His Royal Highness's insistence on not only picking up all the singer's bills, but of placing him under the umbrella, so to speak, of his diplomatic privilege, had a good deal to do with it.

Maestro Korsky-Rimsakov's admirers, which group included perhaps 98.5 percent of the female population of France between the ages of fourteen and ninety-four and perhaps as much as 1.3 percent of French men of all ages, countered that there was nothing in La Belle France that the maestro would have to pay for, if only his desires came to the attention of any woman with a checking account, and that so far as taking advantage of Prince Hassan's diplomatic status, this was pure nonsense with a heavy layer of sour grapes.

It was common knowledge that the maestro possessed dual citizenship as a result of his close friendship with Sheikh Abdullah ben Abzug, hereditary Sheikh of Sheikhs of the Islamic Kingdom of Abzug, 15,000 square miles of granite mountains, sandy desert, and subterranean oil and gas deposits in Northern Africa. Mr. Korsky-Rimsakov had not only been granted honorary Abzugian citizenship, but had also been ennobled (as Sheikh El Noil Snoil the Magnificent) and (possibly so that he would have equal status in the Arab social world with Prince Hassan) granted Abzugian Diplomatic Passport Number One, identifying him as Sheikh Abdullah's Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the World.*

*(* The details of how Sheikh Abdullah and Mr. Korsky-Rimsakov became close friends have been recorded, for students of Arabian Affairs in particular, and for those with prurient interests generally, in M*A*S*H Goes to Morocco (Pocket Books, New York).)*

The simple truth was that Boris liked Hassan. It was, as he often pointed out, a sad and lonely life he had as the world's greatest (and highest paid) opera singer.

“Like anyone else,” he said, “I need a friend who selflessly loves me for myself. Furthermore, for every dollar I have made, enriching the world with my incomparable art, there have been two sneaky sons of [expletive deleted]s trying to con me out of it.”

Prince Hassan (and, practically, Prince Hassan’s fourteen-man personal bodyguard) spared no effort to, as Boris thought of it, “keep the riffraff out of my boudoir.” And Hassan was always on hand to sustain the maestro through the strain which came to him before a performance, to lead the applause during the performance, and to be on hand in the dressing room afterward with effusive praise and what they thought of as a “bird and a bottle.”

The bottle (more often, bottles) was a jeroboam of Piper Heidsieck ’69 champagne and the birds, generally speaking, were the Baroness d’Iberville and Esmerelda Hoffenburg, the ballerina, either singly or, so to speak, in tandem. There were, the ladies knew, two ways to a man’s heart, and between them the Baroness (who made, the maestro said, the world’s best *blini,* Russian blintzes) and Esmerelda (who was something of a contortionist) knew both of them. They had been wise enough to work out between them a sort of roster system and never competed, between themselves, for the maestro’s affections. Not only was there generally enough of what Sheikh Abdullah ben Abzug thought of as El Noil Snoil’s “other art” for both of them, but they had learned that if there was one thing the maestro couldn’t stand, it was women fighting over his attention.

This system generally worked out well, although there had once been a rather noisy incident when the maestro had sung the title role in the *II moro di Venezia* at the Sydney, Australia, opera house. The very efficient opera house security force had taken literally the instruction that no one would be admitted to the singer’s dressing room following the performance until he had had an opportunity to avail himself of the traditional bird and bottle.

The maestro had gone to his dressing room to find only a roast turkey* and a bottle of Manischewitz’ finest Concord, both sent Air Express, cost be damned, from New York, in a sincere if misguided attempt to give him what he wanted. Before he got what he really wanted, Australian opera aficionados received not only confirmation of the most fascinating stories they had heard whispered around about the maestro, but

were treated to the spectacle of their general manager being thrown fifty feet into the harbor.

*(* Turkeys are not indigenous to Australia. On the other hand, kangaroos are not very common in Upper New York State either, proving once again Maestro Korsky-Rimsakov's oft-stated theorem that the world is a strange place indeed, no matter how you look at it.)*

A respectful knock came at the Maestro Korsky-Rimsakov's door.

"Maestro," the general manager of the Paris Opera called. "May I have your permission to begin Act Two?"

"You may," the maestro graciously replied. He walked to the full-length mirror and examined himself carefully. He stood six feet, five inches tall and weighed 280 pounds. Confounding dieticians, who generally frown on large amounts of alcohol and even larger amounts of food, there was not an ounce of fat on him. His dark, rich beard was all his. His teeth were large, healthy, and pearly white.

"Magnificent," the maestro said, evaluating his appearance. "That's the only word that fits—magnificent!" He turned and spoke to His Royal Highness. "Have everything in readiness, Hassan. You know how little I get in return for enriching the drab lives of all those people out there."

"Everything will be in readiness, Maestro," His Royal Highness replied.

"And you know how seldom I get a chance to really enjoy myself in the company of those I love."

"I know, Maestro," His Royal Highness said.

Maestro Korsky-Rimsakov was not, on this occasion, speaking of a bird and bottle.

"I'm ready, Hassan," he said, and strode purposefully to the door. Hassan opened it for him. The two gendarmes stationed outside his door came to attention.* The maestro nodded graciously to them and marched toward the stage.

*(* Maestro Korsky-Rimsakov was in 1972 declared "A National Treasure of La Belle France" by the French Chamber of Deputies, partly because the revenue from matinees magnifiques is acknowledged to be the sole reason the French National Opera Company has not gone bankrupt, and partly because the wife of the presiding officer of the Chamber of Deputies threatened to shut off husbandly privilege unless "some suitable honor" was paid to her "Cher Boris." In any event, his status as a National*

*Treasure was made official, and as such, like the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre Museum, and the Folies Bergfcres, he was placed under the twenty-four-hour protection of the Gendarmerie Nationale.)*

Act Two of *La forza del destino,* as the highbrow readers of a cultural tome such as this are fully aware, takes place in an inn in the village of Homachuelos. The script calls for Don Carlo, disguised as a student, to enter and take his place among the mule drivers and other peasants at dinner.

A hush fell over the audience as the curtain rose to show the peasants milling around. Then there was a sound like a vacuum cleaner gone mad as every female in the audience drew in a lungful of breath and turned her eyes to stage right, where Don Carlo would appear.

He appeared. Every female in the house exhaled. There was a faint smattering of applause, which quickly turned into a thunderous roar.

Don Carlo—that is to say, Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov—turned to face the audience. He raised his arms wide, high above his head.

*"Mes enfants!"* he said, which wasn't in the script.

Here and there women dropped to the floor in a semi-catatonic state. Those who hadn't swooned rose to their feet, cheering, whistling, screaming his name. From the box closest to the stage, two dozen long-stemmed roses floated downward. Moments later, the first hotel key came sailing through the air, immediately followed by others, and then a black lacy garment, size 38-C, floated onto the stage, immediately followed by a pair of shocking pink panties and a rather formidable foundation garment.

The maestro shook his finger.

"Control yourself, girls," he called.

Ushers rushed down aisles, restoring order. Boris waited patiently until this had been done and then stepped away from the footlights and began to sing.

Approximately two hours later, Boris (that is to say, in his role as Don Carlo) stabbed his sister. Normally this sad and tragic event takes place, as they say, offstage. Since this was a *matinee magnifique* it took place on stage. It also took place to accompaniment from the audience.

"Sock it to her, Cher Boris!"

"Off with her head!"

"Slit her throat!" _

“It’s all her fault!”

Boris raised his hand to acknowledge the cheers and applause. The curtain fell.

Boris jumped to his feet and dashed offstage.

“Maestro!” the manager said. “The curtain calls!”

“Isn’t it enough that I sang?” Boris asked. “How much can you ask of one man, even a magnificent artist like me? I’ve given all that I intend to give of myself. I have no intention of standing out there for the next forty-five minutes or an hour while they shout themselves hoarse. Besides, I must rush to meet some of the few people in the world who love me for myself, who don’t even *ask* me to sing!”

He went directly to the stage door, without stopping at his dressing room. A platoon of gendarmes from the VIP and Dignitary Protection Section locked arms and forced their way through the crowds outside.

Boris strode between the lines of policemen, blowing kisses to his fans, and crawled into the back seat of a waiting Cadillac limousine. Prince was already there and, as Boris slumped back on the seat, reached over and kissed his idol wetly and lovingly on the face.

“Goddamnit!” Boris bellowed. “Hassan, Prince has been rooting in the garbage again! His breath would stop a clock!”

“Maestro,” His Royal Highness replied from behind the safety of the glass window separating the limousine seats, “I personally took Prince to lunch at the Cafe de la Paix while you were being dressed. He had a nice little standing rib of beef.”

Prince, Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov’s best friend in all the world, sensed that something was amiss. He stopped trying to kiss *his* best friend in all the world, and instead laid down on the velour upholstery, placing his head in Boris’s lap and making pathetic little moaning noises in his throat.

“I wonder if they make something for dogs with bad breath?” Boris mused, and then added, “Hassan, find out, and if they do get Prince some.”

“I’ll get him some, but you’ll have to make him take it,” Hassan said. There was little love lost between His Royal Highness and Prince, who was a Scottish wolfhound.* Hassan wasn’t sure whether Prince regarded him as a competitor for the maestro’s affection or as a potential meal, but whatever the reason, he didn’t like the animal and was more than a little afraid of him.

*(* Dog lovers and others are referred to M*A*S*H Goes to Vienna in which the touching tale of how the Dowager Duchess of Folkestone presented her friend Korsky-Rimsakov with Prince is related in what has been described as revolting detail.)*

There was some justification for His Royal Highness's concern. Scottish wolfhounds, generally regarded as a vicious variant of the Irish wolfhound* generally stand four feet high at the shoulder and weigh in the neighborhood of 300 pounds. Prince was even larger.

*(* Two parts wolf to one part Great Dane in the Scottish subspecies as opposed to equal parts of wolf and dane in the Irish.)*

There came the sound of sirens. These were mounted on motorcycles of the VIP escort detachment of the Gendarmerie Nationale assigned to accompany His Royal Highness wherever he went in France. Not only are the French sticklers for the fine points of diplomatic protocol, but the sheikhdom of Hussid is the source of 38 percent of the petroleum needs of La Belle France, and the French are well aware of it.

As His Excellency the President of the French Republic put it to His Excellency the Foreign Minister of the French Republic, "Antoine, whatever that little Arab wants, he gets, *capisce?"*

The sirens cleared a path through the horde (mostly middle-aged women) of the maestro's fans who had mobbed the stage entrance in the hope of catching a glimpse of their idol, and the convoy began to move out. First the motorcycles, then a jeep full of gendarmes, then two black Citroën sedans filled with His Royal Highness's personal bodyguard (attired in Arabian clothes and carrying silver-plated submachine guns), then the limousine itself. Following the limousine was another Citroën, another jeep, and two more motorcycles.

Gathering speed, with lights flashing and sirens screaming, the convoy crossed the Rue de la Paix at the Place de l'Opéra, raced down toward the Place Vendôme, past the Hôtel Ritz, turned right onto Rue de Castiglione at the Tuileries Gardens, then skidded through the Place de la Concorde and up the Champs-Elysées. At Rue Pierre Charron, it turned left. Halfway down the block, it screeched to a halt.

The gendarmes and His Royal Highness's personal bodyguard leaped from their vehicles and set up a protective shield. Traffic was blocked in both directions, and pedestrians were politely but firmly hustled out of the way. Finally, the officer in charge of the Gendarmerie and

Lieutenant Ali Mohammed, detached from his Second Royal Hussid Cavalry to serve as officer-in-charge of His Royal Highness's bodyguard, were satisfied. No deranged person could assault His Royal Highness. More important (since this was the more difficult to prevent), no fan of Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov could get past the guards to shower love and affection on the singer. (While love and affection is normally a good thing and to be desired, it was not so in the case of Mr. Korsky-Rimsakov. The last time his fans had gotten to him personally, after a performance at London's Covent Garden, a contact lasting no more than thirty seconds, the singer had been left standing in his jockey shorts and one sock.)

A signal was made to the Cadillac. His Royal Highness and the maestro quickly got out of the car and walked rapidly across the sidewalk to enter a large, rather staid building.

They walked directly to an elevator which a member of the Gendarmerie had commandeered for their use. They rose to the top floor and then marched down a corridor to a steel-doored room which bore a printed sign: Band Equipment Storage. No Admission by the Order of the Post Commander, Paris Post Number One, The American Legion.

Prince Hassan, who had to run to do it, got to the door first. He put a key in the lock and pushed the door open.

Four men were gathered around a six-sided table. The table was covered with an army blanket. On the table were stacks of chips and playing cards. The four men looked up as the singer entered.

"I asked you guys to wait until I got here," Maestro Korsky-Rimsakov said, hurt in every tremulous syllable.

"And I told you we wouldn't," Colonel Jean-Pierre de la Chevaux replied. Colonel de la Chevaux, who was chairman of the board and chief executive officer of Chevaux Petroleum International, and who had come to Paris directly from Lagos, Nigeria, was not noted for his tact. ''Sit down and shut up, Boris."

"Not to worry, Old Bean, we will have plenty of time to part you from your money." The speaker here was Mr. Angus MacKenzie, V.C., general manager of East Anglia Breweries, Ltd., and consort to Her Grace the Dowager Duchess of Folkestone.

"But I *asked,"* Boris said. "I thought you guys would wait, if I asked. You know how much this means to me."

“For God’s sake, Boris, if you start to cry, I’m going home!” said T. (for Theosophilis) Mullins Yancey, M.D., Ph.D., the chief of staff of the Yancey Clinic of Manhattan, Kansas.

“Up yours,” the fourth poker player said. He was His Most Islamic Majesty, Sheikh Abdullah ben Abzug. His Majesty’s English, which he had learned through his association with the maestro, was rather limited. He knew but five other English phrases, each of them more scatological than the one he had used.

“It’s a terrible thing if you can’t ask your best friends in all the world to hold off the game a lousy thirty minutes,” Boris said, sitting down. “You know I couldn’t deprive all those people of the last scene. They *live* for the moment when I stab my sister.”

“Will you shut up and play cards?” Colonel de la Chevaux said sharply.

“*Et tu,* Horsey?” Boris asked, deeply hurt. But he began to count the stack of chips that had been set before him.

Five minutes later, while Dr. Yancey was deciding whether the two aces he had back to back were worth a bet of a quarter, His Most Islamic Majesty, Sheikh Abdullah ben Abzug turned to the singer and asked him a question. He asked it in Abzugian, a language consisting mainly of snorts, wheezes, and grunts, with a belchlike sound for emphasis. It does not readily translate into English, but the essence of His Majesty’s question was, “How did you make out on the phone?”

In fluent Abzugian snorts, wheezes, and grunts, with several spectacular belchlike sounds, the singer replied that he had suggested to the tenacious SOB that he attempt a physiologically impossible act of self-impregnation.

“You said *that* to the Sainted Chancre Mechanic?”* His Majesty replied, aghast.

*(* The reference here was to B. F. Pierce, M.D., F.A.C.S., chief of surgery of the Spruce Harbor, Maine,. Medical Center.)*

“No, stupid, to the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet,” the maestro replied. “I wouldn’t say anything like that to the Sainted Chancre Mechanic.”

“What I wanted to know, El Noil Snoil,” His Majesty responded, “was whether or not the Sainted Chancre Mechanic and my beloved friend, El Pecker Checker,* would be joining us.”

“I thought you were asking about the Russians,” the singer replied.

*(The reference here is to J. F. X. McIntyre M.D., F.A.C.S., Dr. Pierce’s professional associate and long-time friend.)*

“Did you talk to Hawkeye and Trapper John or not?” Colonel de la Chevaux asked, also in Abzugian. He, too, was referring to Drs. Pierce and McIntyre. Dr. Pierce was known to everyone but his wife and mother as “Hawkeye.” His father, a great fan of James Fenimore Cooper, had wished to name his firstborn after the Last Mohican. Although he had been dissuaded by his wife, he had never called the child by his given name, and neither had anyone else. Dr. McIntyre had come to be called “Trapper John” following an incident in his college days. He had been discovered *en flagrant*, as they say, with a co-ed in the gentlemen’s rest facility aboard a Boston & Maine passenger coach. The lady, fearful for her good name, had denied that she had gone willingly with him (which was the case) and loudly proclaimed that she had been trapped. The appellation stuck.

“Yeah, sure,” the singer replied, somewhat lamely.

“And what did he say?”

“What did who say?”

“Either Hawkeye or Trapper John?”

The singer responded that Trapper John had told him to attempt a biologically impossible act of self-impregnation.

“Will you guys knock off with that funny language?” Dr. T. Mullins Yancey said. “It makes me sick to my stomach.”

“Boris said that when he asked Trapper John to come over for a couple of days, Trapper told him to … ” (Colonel de la Chevaux told Dr. Yancey what Trapper John had told Boris to do.)

“Well,” Dr. Yancey said, “I guess that puts to rest once and for all the scurrilous allegation that the trouble with we who practice the healing arts is that you never know what we mean.”

“Is that all he said?” Colonel de la Chevaux asked.

“No,” Boris replied. “He said that if he and Hawkeye never see any of us again, it will be too soon. If I didn’t know better, I might get the idea that he doesn’t hunger for our company as much as we all hunger for theirs. There must have been some medical disaster which required their full attention.”

“Did you ask them when we can get together?” His Royal Highness asked.

“Trapper said the day after they harvest oranges on the North Pole,” Boris replied, speaking Abzugian, of course.

“If you don’t stop making those obscene noises, Boris,” Dr. Yancey shouted, “I will turn you, surgically, into a soprano!”

“Ah, Doc,” Boris said, beaming at him, “you just don’t know how good it makes me feel just to be with you guys, who love me for myself and not just for my God-given genius and talent!”

“Shut up and play cards,” Dr. Yancey said in almost a whimper. “Just shut up and play cards!”

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## *Chapter Four*

"You busy, Jim -Boy?" the appointments secretary asked, sticking his head into the Oval Office.

"Jest settin' here, whittlin' and rockin'," the occupant of that office said. "Something for you, Lester?"

"That Russian fella's out here, Jim-Boy," the appointments secretary said. "Says he's got to talk to you."

"Which Russian fella would that be, Lester? There's a mess of 'em, you know."

"The one with the blue-dyed hair, Jim-Boy—that one. The *head* Russian."

"He trying to borrow money again, Lester? That what he's after?"

"I ast him that, Jim-Boy, and he swears he won't ask for a dime."

"They always say that," Jim-Boy said. "Then, before you know it, they're into your pockets."

"Shall I run him off?"

"Better not," Jim-Boy said. "Send for What's-his-name, the Secretary of State. I promised him I wouldn't say nothin' to the Russians without him being in the same room."

"This fella says he wants to see you alone, Jim-Boy."

"Just send for What's-his-name, Lester. You're not supposed to argue with me. I'm the head man around here. You jest can't seem to remember that."

"Sometimes I wonder, Jim-Boy, if this was such a good idea. It's not what I thought it would be."

"You had this part confused with Congress, Lester. I told you and I told you, if you wanted to fool around, you had to run for Congress. You should have known that you couldn't fool around, not with the little woman living right here in the same building. Now, are you going to call What's-his-name and tell him to hustle right over, or am I going to have to do it myself?"

"I'm getting right on it," the appointments secretary said. "What do I do with the Russian until Ol' Cy can get over here?"

“Give him a copy of *Playboy* to read,” Jim-Boy said. “Make sure it’s a complete one, with the centerfold. We had that delegation of Baptist preachers in here yesterday, and you know they can’t be trusted to leave the centerfolds alone.”

Ten minutes later, the Secretary of State arrived at the Oval Office.

“You sent for me, sir?”

“Hope I didn’t interrupt anything important, ol’ buddy,” Jim-Boy said. “But just as soon as you get under the desk, I’m going to let that Russian fella with the blue-dyed hair in.”

“You are referring to the Russian ambassador, sir?”

“You got it, Cy,” Jim-Boy said. “I gave you my word that I wouldn’t talk to them unless you were in the same room. When I give my word, I take it very serious—you know that.”

“But why do I have to get under the desk?”

“So he won’t see you,” Jim-Boy said. “He said he wanted to see me alone. Now, if I start saying the wrong thing, Hy … ”

“That’s Cy, sir.”

“Whatever. If I start saying the wrong thing, Cy-Boy, you just give me a little tug on my pants leg. O.K.?”

“I am at your disposal, sir.”

“Keep that in mind, Cy-Boy. There’s a lot of people around here who’d like to have your job, you know. You’re one of the lucky few who got to keep a limousine, you know,” Jim-Boy said. “Most everybody else’s driving themselves around town.”

“I’m aware of that, sir,” Cy said.

“Well, get under the desk, then, and let’s see what this fella wants.”

The Secretary of State got down on all fours and crawled under the massive, gleaming desk.

“Watch out for the spittoon, Cy,” Jim-Boy called.

“I wish you’d said that thirty seconds sooner,” Cy said under his breath.

Jim-Boy pushed a button on his multibuttoned intercom.

“Send in the Russian,” he said.

“Send in who?”

“The Russian. The one with the blue hair. The one you just told me is out there.”

“Excuse me, sir, you have the Office of the Presidential Assistant for Female Affairs. There’s no Russian here.”

“Oops. Wrong button. Sorry about that.” He bent over the multibuttoned intercom, found the right button, pushed it, and repeated the order to send the Russian in. Then he sat down in his rocking chair again.

“Sir,” the appointments secretary said, “the ambassador of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.”

“I bring the warmest greetings of not only the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet,” the Russian ambassador said, “but of the millions of peace-loving workers and peasants as well.”

“Come on in, sit down, and have a boiled peanut,” Jim-Boy said, waving the Russian ambassador into another rocking chair and extending to him a bowl of boiled peanuts.

“Thank you so much,” the Russian ambassador said.

“Grow them myself,” Jim-Boy said. “And I don’t even send the General Services Administration a bill for them.”

The Russian ambassador put several of the boiled peanuts in his mouth. Despite long years of training and experience at eating what are politely called “ethnic” dishes at various diplomatic functions, he was unable to keep from making a face.

“Something wrong with the peanuts?” Jim-Boy asked.

“They are a new taste to me, sir,” the Russian ambassador said.

“You’re probably used to the Yankee kind,” Jim-Boy explained. “They roast theirs. We boil ours. I asked Senator Kamikaze … you know who I mean?”

“Yes, of course, the Japanese-American educator-statesman from California.”

“That’s the fella,” Jim-Boy said. “I asked him what he thought and he said they tasted like soap. But then, he’s a Republican, and they’re all a little sore about how the election turned out.”

“The Chairman of the Supreme Soviet and the millions of peace-loving Russian workers and peasants rejoiced in your election, sir,” the Russian ambassador said.

“Old Lester did tell you, didn’t he, that I’m not going to loan you any more money?”

“The gentleman you mention, sir, did make a statement along those lines,” the ambassador said.

“Just so we understand each other,” Jim-Boy said. “Now, what can I do for you?”

“Are we alone, sir? Completely alone?”

Jim-Boy, before replying, put his right hand behind his back and crossed his fingers.

“Completely alone,” he said. “There’s nobody here but you and me and that oil painting of Shur-lee Strydent.” Jim-Boy indicated the picture of the actress-singer hanging on the wall.

“Ah, yes,” the ambassador said, “the actress.”

“The singer *and* actress,” Jim-Boy said. “Now there’s some who don’t appreciate Miss Strydent. My own brother calls her the world’s ugliest movie star, but he’s probably just saying that to make me mad. He gets his kicks making me mad. I keep that picture of her hanging there to remind me that I’ve got an obligation to the arts, if you know what I mean.”

“The arts? Of course, sir, I know what you mean. And it is the arts about which I wish to speak to you.”

“The arts? Funny, I thought you’d come to talk about those armored divisions you’ve been moving around Poland and East Germany.”

“You know about that, sir?”

“Got it straight from the horse’s mouth,” Jim-Boy said. “And from a source I can trust.”

“Oh?”

“From a classmate of mine. An Annapolis classmate. The navy academy. We take an oath, you know. Never lie to each other. Maybe to Congress and the army and the air force, but never to each other. That’s why I put him in charge over there in Virginia. In a job like that, you need somebody you can trust—you know what I mean?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I mean, I’d really hate to blow your country up, Mr. Ambassador, on the wrong information. If I’m going to do something like that …” He stopped in midsentence and seemed to shift on his chair.

“Is something wrong, sir?” the Russian ambassador asked. “It looked for a moment as if you were being pulled under your desk.”

“My foot went to sleep is all,” Jim-boy said. “Now, we started to talk about the arts …”

“Indeed we did. May I ask, sir, if you are acquainted with the name Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov?”

“Of course I am, Mr. Ambassador. I’d hate you to get the idea that just because I went to Annapolis and come from Georgia that we don’t know what’s going on in the world. I’m fully aware that whatever that name was you said is one of the most distinguished of your countrymen.”

“Excuse me, sir,” the ambassador said, “but he’s one of *your* countrymen.”

“What was that name again?”

“Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov,” the ambassador repeated.

“Of course, *Boris* Korsky-Rimsakov,” Jim-Boy said, crossing his fingers. “I must have been thinking of the other one, *Alfred* Korsky-Whatever. Well, what about him?”

“Our beloved Chairman of the Supreme Soviet has a little favor to ask of you, sir,” the ambassador said. “Vis-à-vis Maestro Korsky-Rimsakov.”

“I thought you said his name was Sergei, or something like that. One of those funny Russian names.”

“*Boris* is his name, sir.”

“Well, get to the point, Mr. Ambassador, I’m a busy man. With all those armored divisions being moved around Poland and East Germany, I’ve got to make up my mind which of your cities I’m going to blow up first …” Again he stopped in midsentence and shifted downward in his chair, as if he were being pulled under his desk. “Have some more boiled peanuts,” he said.

“Not just now, thank you, sir,” the ambassador said. “Is there something wrong, sir. Something under your desk?”

“Just an old spittoon,” Jim-Boy said. “Sometimes it gets in my way. You were saying?”

“I’ll get right to the bottom line, sir,” the ambassador said. “If you can give me your personal assurance that Boris Korsky-Rimsakov will appear, twice, at the Bolshoi, I am prepared to give you my personal assurance that the maneuvers of our tank divisions in East Germany and Poland will cease.”

“Let me think about that,” Jim-Boy said. “My gut reaction is to say, hell, yes, you got a deal, but my Secretary of State warned me about you guys. Said you can’t be trusted as far as I can throw you.”

And again Jim-Boy seemed to be struggling with something attacking his right leg.

A disembodied voice spoke. “Tell him yes, for God’s sake.”

“I beg your pardon, sir?” the Soviet ambassador said.

“That was just me thinking out loud,” Jim-Boy said. “Now, let’s go over this again. If I give you my word that this Korsky-Borsky, whatever, comes to Moscow, you’ll give me your word that you’ll stop the hanky-panky with your armored divisions. Is that about the nut of it?”

“That’s it. Deal?”

“Let’s not get carried away. If I give you my word, you got something. I never lie. Anybody will tell you that. If I say What’s-his-name will go to Moscow, you can bet your last two cents on it. But I’m not so sure about your word. I mean, what if I sent Korsky-Borsky all the way over there, and you didn’t stop fooling around with the tank divisions? You know where that would leave me? It would leave me standing there with egg on my face, that’s where it would leave me. God knows, the Republicans would just love something like that!”

“Have you something in mind, sir?”

“I think you should sweeten the deal a little,” Jim-Boy said.

“How, exactly?”

“You get in touch with your boss and tell him if he can get that fat fella who keeps calling me names in the UN to knock it off, and to keep his shoes on his feet instead of banging on his desk with them, I would accept that as proof of your good faith, and Ol’ What’s-his-name will be on the next plane to Moscow. How does that sound?”

“You’ve got a deal, sir,” the Soviet ambassador said.

“It’s a pleasure doing business with you,” Jim-Boy said. He opened his desk drawer, took a small paper bag from it, and handed it to the ambassador. “Take these home to your wife, Mr. Ambassador,” he said. “A little souvenir from me.”

“Thank you so very much, sir,” the Ambassador said. He opened the bag. “Oh, *boiled peanuts!* My wife will be thrilled.”

“My pleasure,” Jim-Boy said, beaming. “Thanks for coming to see me.”

He walked the Russian ambassador to the door.

“Y’all come back, hear?” he called after him in the Southern manner, and then he closed the door. “O.K., Cy-Boy, get out from under the desk. He’s gone.”

The Secretary of State crawled out from under the desk.

“Say what you like about Nixon,” he said, “but *his* Secretary of State got to eavesdrop on private conversations sitting in an upholstered chair with earphones on his head.”

“There will be no bugging in my White House,” Jim-Boy said firmly.

“Then you’re going to have to get a bigger desk,” the Secretary of State said. “That’s the last time I’m going to spend ten minutes with my nose in your spittoon.”

“How’d I do, Cy-Boy?” Jim-Boy asked, to change the conversation.

“On the whole, rather well, I would judge. I think we came out of that one on top.”

“I thought so myself,” Jim-Boy said. “I didn’t get to be the Peanut King of the Tri-County Area giving things away, I’ll tell you that. There’s only one little problem.”

“Which is, sir?”

“Who’s this Korsky-Borsky character? And what do they want with him in Moscow?”

“That’s Korsky-Rimsakov,” the Secretary of State replied.

“If there’s one think I don’t like, Cy-Boy, it’s a smartass Yankee always correcting me,” Jim-Boy said. “Just tell me who he is and what they want with him.”

“I haven’t the foggiest,” the Secretary of State confessed.

“That figures,” Jim-Boy said. “You’re going to have to straighten up, Cy-Boy, if you know what I mean. There’s no room for dead wood around my White House. You keep that in mind.”

He walked behind his desk, sat down, and picked up his telephone.

“Let me talk to the Admiral,” he said a moment later. Pause. “What do you mean what admiral? How many have you got over there, anyway?” Pause. “That many? No fooling?” Pause. “The head admiral, then.” Pause. “Yeah, I mean the director.” Pause. “Who’s calling? Who do you think is calling on the direct line from the President’s desk, Ronald Reagan?”

He covered the mouthpiece with his hand. “They’re getting him on the line. He’s at a little party they’re having for Annapolis alumni.” Then he took his hand off the microphone. “Admiral,” he said, “this is Your Commander-in-Chief.” Pause. “Yeah, who would have ever dreamed, when we were rowing those lousy lifeboats around Annapolis harbor in the rain!” Pause. “Yeah, well I’m sorry I wasn’t there, too, I would have liked to have

rubbed it in some of their faces, but I've been busy-busy-busy." Pause. "Listen, ol' buddy, I'm sitting here with Cy and we've got a little problem. You ever hear of somebody named … what was that name again, Cy?"

"Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov," the Secretary of State said.

"Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov," Jim-Boy said to the Admiral. Pause. "What do you mean, no? You're the head of the CIA, and when your Commander-in-Chief calls up and asks you a simple little question, you're supposed to have the answer. You find out everything there is to know about this guy, and get right back to me." Pause. "No, I can't give you a hint. You just find out and get your tail over here with the answer at flank speed. You read me, Admiral?"

He slammed the phone down in its cradle. He looked at the Secretary of State. "Just because he graduated ahead of me at the academy, he thinks he can get away with murder. I've always been suspicious of bookworms." A look of annoyance crossed his face as the famous smile vanished. "Don't just set there, Cy-Boy, like a boll weevil with his belly full of cotton."

"What would you have me do, sir?"

"Get your tail over to Foggy Bottom and look in your files. That German fella must have left notes or something. If the Russians know this Rimsky-Bimsky fella, he must have …"

"That's Korsky-Rimsakov, sir," the Secretary of State said.

"This is the last time I'm going to tell you, Cy-Boy, you're only the lousy Secretary of State. You're in no position to go around all the time correcting your Commander-in-Chief."

"Sorry, sir," the Secretary said. "I'll get right on it."

"When you're riding over there in that fancy limousine, with the air-conditioning and all, on them foam rubber seats, you think about it, Cy-Boy. You don't have a contract, you know. Keep that in mind."

Two hours later, the Secretary of State and the director of the Central Intelligence Agency met, both gentlemen loaded down with thick files, in the office of the appointments secretary.

"Lester, he expects us," the Secretary of State said.

"The phrase he used was 'at flank speed,' " the Admiral said. "Among us Annapolis men that means just as fast as possible."

“He’s in there with a delegation from India,” the appointments secretary said. “Friends of his mother. There’s no way you’re going to get in there until they finish getting that cobra back in its basket, and that’s that.” Five minutes later, they were admitted.

“Permission to come aboard, sir?” the Admiral said, jocularly, as he stepped out of the way of the fakir carrying a wicker basket.

“Y’all come in,” Jim-Boy said. “You just missed quite a show. Snake stood right up on its tail.” He walked behind his desk and sat down. “Well, let’s have it. Who is this Korsky-Whatever, and why do the Russians want him?”

“We have an extensive file on him,” the Admiral said. “And so does the State Department,” the Secretary of State said. “Unfortunately, extracting information from them may pose a little problem.”

“How’s that, Cy-Boy?” Jim-Boy asked.

“My predecessor in office chose to keep them in Latin,” the Secretary of State said. “He was a schoolteacher, you know.”

“That isn’t all he was,” Jim-Boy said. “Well, let’s have what you have.”

“The news isn’t good, sir,” the Admiral said.

“What is he, some sort of atomic scientist? They want to pick his brain, is that it?”

“No, sir,” the Secretary of State said. “He’s the world’s greatest opera singer.”

“Opera singer? Opera singer? You’re not putting me on, Cy-boy, are you? I wouldn’t like that at all.”

“The Secretary’s information is correct, sir,” the Admiral said. “He’s also *Une Tresor Officiel de la Belle France.”*

“Just tell me the facts, and knock off the Latin, Admiral,” Jim-Boy said.

“He’s an Official Treasure of France, sir.”

“I was told he was an American,” Jim-Boy said.

“He is,” the Secretary of State said. “But he’s also an Official Treasure of France. And he’s …”

“I don’t have time for all the details—just answer the question. Is there any reason we can’t load this guy on an airplane and send him to Russia for a couple of days?”

“Our preliminary information suggests that he may not wish to go,” the Admiral said.

“I didn’t ask whether or not he wants to go—I asked is there any reason we can’t send him?”

“We could ask him to go, as a patriotic duty …” the Secretary of State said.

“Get him on the phone,” Jim-Boy said. “I’ll ask him myself, personally.”

“There is reason to believe that sending him to Moscow may not be such a good idea, sir,” the Admiral said.

“Of course it’s a good idea. I promised that Russian, the one with the blue hair, that I’d send him.”

“There are certain little details concerning the gentleman, sir,” the Secretary of State said, “of which I feel, in order to make a sound judgment, you should be fully apprised.” ‘

“There you go again, Cy-Boy. When I offered you that job, you promised that you would speak English like a normal American. Now say that again, and simple.”

“Mr. Korsky-Rimsakov has—what shall I say?—a rather difficult personality.”

“So does my brother. You learn to live with things like that.”

“Sir, may I suggest that we give you a quick rundown on the gentleman and the problems he may pose?” the Admiral said.

“Just make it quick,” Jim-Boy said. “I’ve got other things to do, too, you know.”

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## *Chapter Five*

While Dr. Benjamin Franklin Pierce, F.A.C.S., was well aware that his bride might be a little surprised to have him walk in the door of his home at half past two in the afternoon, he was not prepared for the reaction he got.

Mary Pierce, dabbing at her eyes with a soggy Kleenex, threw herself, sobbing, into his arms and announced, “Oh, Benjamin, how glad I am to see you!”

“Do I intuitively feel that something is amiss?” Dr. Pierce inquired.

“Martha-Jane does have gangrene after all,” Mary Pierce said.

“I’m really sorry to hear that,” Dr. Pierce replied. “Did the Pleasant Valley General Hospital Laboratory make another mistake?”

“You know about it, then?” Mary Pierce inquired, having regained enough control of herself to be able to blow her nose.

“Those things get around,” Dr. Pierce said. “Makes it a little tough on Martha-Jane, doesn’t it, with her in the family way, expecting triplets, her lover-and-soon-to-be-husband, Dr. Jerome Dashing, lost on the Upper Amazon, termites in her wooden leg, and now this diagnosis of gangrene of the bosom …”

“Who said anything about termites in her wooden leg?” Mary Pierce snapped. “Benjamin, I would hate to think that you were mocking me. You know how I hate being mocked!”

“Perish the thought!” Benjamin Franklin “Hawkeye” Pierce said. “You know that I have come to think of Martha-Jane almost as a member of the family.”

“If you really felt that way, you wouldn’t make jokes about her having termites in her wooden leg,” Mary Pierce said.

“Life must go on, you know,” Hawkeye said, somewhat piously. As his father had told him years before, the one verity of life was that females were different from men.

“My advice to you, Hawkeye, when the time comes, and you enter what is sometimes jocularly known as the blissful state of matrimony, is

that you expect your beloved to have at least two screws loose. If you can learn to live with those two loose screws, you may live through it."

For the first formative years of their union, Hawkeye had watched Mary carefully so that he would be able to identify the two loose screws as they came undone and be prepared to cope with them. He had, as the result of calm and scientifically objective analysis, just about come to the conclusion that his Mary was going to be the exception that proved the rule. She had gone through the end-of-the-honeymoon trauma and first (and second and third) pregnancy and delivery without even a hint of a hint of a loose screw. She had even passed through the whirlpool of the Seven-Year Itch and Sending-the-Baby-Off-to-Kindergarten trauma demonstrating a mental stability and all-around level-headedness and practicality that at once astonished him and permitted a degree of self-congratulation on his choice of a mate with whom to skip hand in hand down life's rocky path.

But then, eighteen months before, without warning, the first screw had come loose. Mary Pierce, together with some 41,890,078 of her gender, had innocently come in contact (Mary while waxing the kitchen floor) with the trials and tribulations of Martha-Jane McSweeney and immediately become what Dr. Pierce thought of as a hopeless addict, beyond any reasonable hope of cure or even remission.

Martha-Jane McSweeney was the central character in a daytime television drama (or soap opera) entitled "Life's Little Agonies, Part II." Martha-Jane's social, physical, psychiatric, and moral dilemmas occupied Mary's thoughts from two to two-thirty every weekday.

Dr. Pierce was well aware that if Mary knew what he really thought of Martha-Jane generally and "Life's Little Agonies, Part II" specifically his previous happy marriage would come to an abrupt and painful end. For, the law of averages being what it is, of the other 41,890,078 other faithful female fans, at least two dozen could be found at any given time inside the Spruce Harbor Medical Center, where Dr. Pierce functioned as chief of surgery. Some "Life's Little Agonies, Part II" addicts were patients and some were members of the staff. Indeed, Mr. T. Alfred Crumley, Spruce Harbor Medical Center's somewhat less than beloved hospital administrator, was, in Dr. Pierce's judgment, one of the worst of what he thought of as the "Little Agonies Freaks."

Mr. Crumley had gone so far as to write offering his services, absolutely free of charge, to the Pleasant Valley General Hospital. He was

“professionally equipped,” he wrote (c/o the Amalgamated Broadcasting System, New York City), to straighten out not only the Pleasant Valley General Hospital’s laboratory but their personnel office as well. The Pleasant Valley General Hospital did not reply, a happenstance Mr. Crumley ascribed to shame and remorse. Any hospital with a laboratory which had great difficulty differentiating between gangrene and measles (not to mention that between mononucleosis and a certain social disease involving spirochetes*) would not want to come right out and admit it.

*(* This came up when Dr. Jerome Dashing, home from one of his frequent trips to the Upper Amazon, had a physical check-up at Pleasant Valley General and the lab reported he had an advanced case of social disease involving spirochetes. Before their error was discovered, and his illness properly diagnosed as mononucleosis, Martha-Jane had for the sixteenth time seriously considered suicide, and Dr. Dashing had had to go through the embarrassment of suggesting to Heloise Horter, the wife of his best friend, Dr. A. Satchwell Horter, that as the result of her rather warm greeting of him on his return, he had to suggest that she seek medical attention, and seek it far from Pleasant Valley General, so that the nature of her distress would not become fodder for the Pleasant Valley gossips.)*

A rather serious free-for-all brawl had taken place in the geriatric ward between two octogenarians, one of whom had violently objected to the other’s referring to Martha-Jane as a “one-legged hooker” and begun the affray by crashing into him with his wheelchair.

And there were other unfortunate incidents as well, involving practically everybody from Inez Heidenheimer, the Spruce Harbor Medical Center telephone operator, to the Honorable “Moosenose” Bartlett, mayor of Spruce Harbor, who violently insisted that a scheduled surgical procedure (involving the removal of a wart from his nose) be delayed until after “Life’s Little Agonies, Part II” had been telecast. “I simply couldn’t risk my life under the surgeon’s knife without knowing whether fatherly Reverend Kenman had really been making those obscene telephone calls to Martha-Jane or whether it was really the chief of police.”

Only three people at Spruce Harbor seemed immune to “Life’s Little Agonies, Part II.” Dr. Pierce was immune, and so were his professional associates and close friends, Dr. John Francis Xavier McIntyre, F.A.C.S., and Esther Flanagan, R.N., chief of nursing services. Among themselves they had worked out a rather simple solution to the problem: From 2:00

until 2:30 P.M. weekdays no hospital procedure more complicated than changing bedpans was scheduled. Emergencies, of course, arose from time to time during the telecast. These were handled by hospital personnel on a roster basis, amid muttered references to the effect that while they had fully expected to make sacrifices in the course of their medical careers, they had really expected nothing like this.

Dr. Pierce was thus not especially disturbed to find his wife sobbing into a soggy Kleenex over “Life’s Little Agonies, Part II.” What really worried him in his heart of hearts was when he could expect the other screw to come loose and what would happen when it did. His father, who was a wise man and who had never lied to him, had spoken of loose female secrets in the plural.

As he comfortingly patted his wife’s shoulder, he could see the boob tube screen. The day’s episode was over. As the studio organist enthusiastically thumped out some of Johann Sebastian Bach’s more melancholy musical passages, the screen showed the “Life’s Little Agonies, Part II” trademark. The camera pulled in close on the Mona Lisa, mounted on a slowly moving pedestal standing in a sea of fog. It pulled closer and closer until only Mona’s face was visible. The viewer could then see a solitary tear run down Mona’s face. Mona then began to fade as the “credit drum” rolled.

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Executive Producer, Wesley St. James.

Filmed Before a Live Audience at the Wesley St.

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Finally the screen went momentarily dark.

Then, as the words appeared, one by one,* an announcer with a deep, if somewhat lisping, voice intoned, “Now stay tuned for ‘The Globe Spinneth,’ a Wesley St. James Production.”

*(* It is an article of faith among the folks in the television industry that at least half of their audience is illiterate. Hence the practice of having*

*announcers slowly read what words appear on the screen as they appear. This is known as taking positive action to meet the public need.)*

"It's over, dear," Hawkeye said. "And I am here to console you in your hour of need."

"So you are," Mary Pierce said. Her tone of voice suddenly changed. She suddenly pushed free from her husband. "Knock that off," she said. "What if one of the children should come home unexpectedly from school?"

"But you said you were glad to see me," Hawkeye said.

"Not that glad," she said. "You men are all alike. You-know-what is all you ever think about."

"Aren't you even going to ask what I'm doing home in the middle of the afternoon?"

"I don't have to ask," she said. "The answer is no."

"Then why did you say you were glad to see me?"

"I wanted to see you before supper," Mary said.

"I should, I suppose, be flattered, but I sense a curve ball in there somewhere," Hawkeye said.

"I wanted specifically," Mary said, "to catch you before the regularly scheduled afternoon conference of the chief of surgery and staff began. To make sure, in other words, that you came home from work smelling of nothing stronger than mint Life Savers."

"What's the occasion?" Hawkeye asked jocularly. "Are we having Brother 'Born-Again Bob' Roberts for supper?"

Brother "Born-Again Bob" Roberts was one of the more visible and audible clergypersons in the Spruce Harbor area. He and his wife, popularly known as "Sister Wilma" and even more popularly as "Weeping Wilma " had come to the Rock Bound Coast from somewhere in the Deep South with the announced intention of driving Satan's favorite dark angel, John Barleycorn, out of Maine even as St. Patrick drove the snakes out of Ireland.

To accomplish this end, they acquired controlling interest in a radio station which had been going rapidly broke broadcasting what is known as classical music. Thirty minutes after he had handed over the check (Brother Bob paid cash, the revival business being one of the more lucrative professions south of the Mason-Dixon Line) and acquired title, the programming of The Cultured Voice of Spruce Harbor was interrupted in

the middle of Felix Mendelsshon-Bartholdy's Sonata No. 2 in D Major for Cello and Piano, Opus 58.

"We interrupt this program to bring you a special announcement," Brother "Born-Again" Bob's deep voice had intoned. "God has come to Spruce Harbor, and it's time for you, John Barleycorn, to get out!" He paused to let this sink in, and all twenty-four listeners heard for the first time in the background a sound with which they would soon become all too familiar: Sister Wilma, carried away with emotion, was sobbing loudly in the background.

"We now resume our regular programming," Brother Bob intoned. But it was not Maestro Mendelsshon who came back on the air. It was a musical ensemble known as Porky Pig & the Swine, a hard-rock organization whose appeal to classical music lovers was rather limited.

Brother Bob was not interested in classical music lovers.

He was after what he thought of as "ordinary folks" and the way to reach them was with Porky Pig & the Swine and others of that genre. He did follow, however, the practice of The Cultured Voice of Spruce Harbor in the matter of finance. BBB (Before Brother Bob) the musical programs were periodically interrupted with plaintive pleas for the listening audience to make a financial contribution to keep the station on the air. Brother Bob maintained this practice but added to it the information that contributions to The Voice of Total Temperance, as the station was now known, were tax deductible. BBB the station had been a commercial enterprise. It was now the radio voice of the Get Thee Behind Me John Barleycorn Religious Foundation, and according to IRS regulation, a bona fide recipient of charitable and/or religious donations.

The Get Thee Behind Me John Barleycorn Religious Foundation also sponsored the Brother Bob Rock In & Revivals, which featured such famous groups as the Swines' in person, admission free, in what had once been the Spruce Harbor Roxy Movie Palace. Those who wished to sit down were asked to make a tax-free religious donation of $7.50. Between "sets," as they are known in the profession, Brother Bob gave little talks about the benefits of total temperance.

Truth being stranger than fiction, two of the twenty-four faithful listeners to the classical* music BBB were Drs. Benjamin Franklin "Hawkeye" Pierce and John Francis Xavier "Trapper John" McIntyre. They had even had it piped into the surgical suites. Neither gentleman was

especially pleased with the change in musical programming, and both were more than a little annoyed with Brother Bob's radio style. The found his standard opening remark "Put that bottle down!" rather disconcerting, particularly if it reached them just as they were, in fact, about to pick a bottle up.

*(* At one time, this sort of music was known as "long hair" music. For obvious reasons, this is no longer applicable.)*

Brother Born-Again Bob's radio programming was a thorn, so to speak, in Dr. Pierce's side. When he inquired of his bride whether that clergyperson was coming for super, he was making his little joke.

"Somebody told you!" Mary Pierce responded.

"You're kidding!" Hawkeye replied. "This is your idea of a joke, right?"

"He's really a very nice man, Benjamin," Mary Pierce replied.

"Not in my house! Over my dead body!"

"He just walked into the Spruce Harbor Working Mother's Child-Care Center this morning and presented us with a very nice check," Mary said. Mary, who was co-chairwoman of the Working Mother's Child-Care Center, worked there four mornings a week.

"He gave money away?" Hawkeye asked, curiosity having got the better of him.

"Five thousand dollars," she said. "And you know how we need the money."

"What's the catch?" Hawkeye asked.

"Don't be so suspicious," Mary said. "He said he had learned what good work we were doing and how we were always short of money, and he said that as fellow laborers in the Lord's work, he felt it his duty to help as best he could."

"Have you tried to cash the check?" Hawkeye asked.

"Oh, I rushed it right to the bank," she said. "It was good as gold."

"I'll be damned!"

"I rushed it right to the bank right after I asked him to supper," Mary said quickly.

"I hope you have a very pleasant supper," Hawkeye said. "I'll be at the Bide-a-While."*

*(* Dr. Pierce here referred to the Bide-a-While Pool Hall/Ladies Served, Fresh Lobsters & Clams Daily Restaurant and Saloon, Inc., Stanley*

*K. Warczinski, Sr., Proprietor.)*

"Actually, Benjamin," Mary said. "I think it would be better if you were here. Brother Bob really wants to talk to you."

"Oh, my God, the other screw finally came loose!" Hawkeye said.

"What did you say?"

"Freely translated, dear, there is no way I am going to have supper with Brother Bob."

"He wants to talk to you," Mary said.

"I thought it would be something like that," Hawkeye said.

"Now see here, Benjamin," Mary said. "I put up with your weird religious friends. Turnabout is fair play."

"But you like Hot Lips*!" Hawkeye protested.

*(* This reference here is to the Reverend Mother Emeritus Margaret Houlihan Wachauf Wilson, R.N., of the God Is Love In All Forms Christian Church, Inc. Scholars of ecclesiastic phenomena are referred to other books in the M*A*S*H series (especially M*A*S*H Goes to Paris, M*A*S*H Goes to London, and M*A*S*H Goes to Las Vegas. Pocket Books makes these books available as a public service, and at very reasonable prices, considering their all-around high class, indeed.)*

"And you will like Brother Bob and Sister Wilma, once you get to know them," Mary-said.

"You know where I'll be," Hawkeye said, turning around and starting to leave.

"I know where you'll be, Benjamin," Mary said softly. "There's one little thing I didn't mention."

"What's that?"

"I'm not asking you, Benjamin," she said. "This is more in the nature of what you could call a nonnegotiable demand. If it means five thousand dollars for the Child-Care Center, darling, you're not only going to have supper with Brother Bob and Sister Wilma, but you're going to act as if you're having a fine time."

"What do they want to talk to me about?" Hawkeye asked. He had been married long enough to recognize defeat when it smote him on the forehead.

"Their daughter," Mary said.

"Their daughter?"

“She wants to become an opera singer,” Mary said. “And when it came out in the course of conversation that you are such fast friends with dear Mr. Korsky-Rimsakov …”

“*Dear* Mr. Korsky-Rimsakov? Is that the same *dear* Mr. Korsky-Rimsakov you customarily refer to as ‘Old Bull Bellow’? Or as ‘That disgusting drunk’?”

“Don’t be argumentative, dear,” Mary said. “Pointless arguments are the death of a happy marriage—you said that yourself.”

“Do you know why I came home from the hospital at this time, Mary?”

“I know why, and I told you no.”

“The reason I came home, Mary, was to tell you that I had just spoken with Boris on the phone.”

“How nice!” Mary said. “That’s what they call a fortuitous circumstance, isn’t it?”

“I wanted to tell you what I told him, Mary,” Hawkeye said, “when he said that he and Dr. Yancey and Horsey and Abdullah wanted me and Trapper John to come to a stag party in Paris.”

“I’m glad you came home so that we could have this little chat,” Mary said, “but why didn’t you telephone?”

“You can’t use that kind of language on the telephone,” Hawkeye said. “It’s against the law.”

“Why, whatever did you say?”

He told her.

“Shame on you, Benjamin Franklin Pierce!” Mary said. “You ought to have your mouth washed out with soap! And besides, that’s a physiological impossibility, isn’t it?”

At nine minutes after six, Dr. Benjamin Franklin Pierce answered his door and found Dr. and Mrs. John Francis Xavier McIntyre standing there.

“I just want you to know, Hawkeye,” Trapper John said, in a tone that could not accurately be described as friendly, “that I blame this entirely on you!”

“I should have listened to my father,” Hawkeye said. “He warned me about times like this.”

“Come right in!” Mary Pierce cheerfully called. “The Reverend and Mrs. Roberts will be here soon.”

“Whoopee!” Trapper John said.

“Come into my study a moment, please,” Dr. Pierce said to Dr. McIntyre, and Dr. McIntyre dutifully followed him into the small room filled with discarded furniture and the so-far-unironed week’s wash. Hawkeye pushed the wash baskets aside, giving him access to a shelf of books. He began taking the books off the shelf.

“I was a Boy Scout, you know. And I took to heart the maxim to always be prepared.” He reached for something at the back of the shelf.

“Put that bottle down!” a deep, Southern-flavored voice called.

“My God, he can see through walls!” Trapper John said. “Let me have that first. *I’m* the guest.”

He drank quickly from the bottle and handed it back to Hawkeye. “I really shouldn’t give it back,” he said. “If it wasn’t for you, I’d be home by my own hearth with a bottle of my own.”

Hawkeye took a quick pull at the bottle and then quickly turned his back as the door opened.

“Benjamin,” Mary Pierce cooed sweetly in the manner of women in the presence of clergypersons. “The Reverend Roberts is here.”

“Put that bottle down!” Born-Again Bob intoned in his loud voice.

“I just did,” Hawkeye muttered, stuck the bottle back where it had been, and stood up.

“Reverend Roberts,” he said.

“God loves you!” Born-Again Bob announced.

“Sometimes I wonder,” Hawkeye said.

“If I didn’t know better,” Born-Again Bob announced, “I would swear that I sniff John Barleycorn’s evil product in these premises.”

“Oh, no,” Mary Pierce said.

“My sniffer is seldom wrong, Sister Mary,” Born-Again Bob said.

“While I must admit that liquor has, on rare occasion, passed the lips of my husband, the doctor,” Mary Pierce said, “I’m sure that neither he nor Dr. McIntyre would *think* about so much as sniffing a cork knowing that you and Sister Wilma would be here. Would you, Benjamin?”

“Perish the thought,” Hawkeye said.

“A pleasure to meet you, too, Brother John,” Brother Bob said to Trapper John. “Sister Lucinda has told me so much about you.”

“Has she really?” Trapper John said.

“Sister Lucinda’s been telling me what a man of culture you really are,” Brother Bob said.

“Did you smell her breath, by any chance?” Hawkeye asked.

“Watch it, Hawkeye,” Trapper John said.

“Specifically, that you are not only a classical music fan, but that you saved the life of the world’s greatest opera singer during the Korean War,” Brother Bob went on.

“That was Doctor Pierce who did that, Brother Bob,” Trapper John said, quickly.

“Oh, no it wasn’t,” Hawkeye said. “Don’t be over-modest, Doctor. The credit, or the blame, depending on how you look at it, is all yours.”

“Do you know what Boris did to me today?” Trapper John said to Hawkeye. “He sent me another set of his complete recorded works. Sixty-seven long-playing records. Air Freight from Paris. Collect. And my receptionist paid for them!”

“That’s what you get for saving his life,” Hawkeye said.*

*(* Maestro Korsky-Rimsakov answered his country’s call and followed the flag to Korea during the unpleasantness there. Under the nom de guerre “Bob Alexander” he served as PFC and Browning Automatic Rifleman under Colonel (then Sergeant) J. P. de la Chevaux in the 223rd Infantry on Heartbreak Ridge. Grievously (no fooling) wounded while carrying platoon Sergeant Chevaux (who alone knew where the booze was hidden) off the battlefield, he was taken to the 4077th M*A*S*H, where he was operated upon by Drs. Pierce and McIntyre (then Captains, U.S. Army Medical Corps) and nursed back to health by then Major Margaret “Hot Lips” Houlihan, Nurse Corps, U.S.A. So began their lifelong long association. Readers with a burning desire to learn more of field medical procedures are directed to M*A*S*H and all its many sequels.)*

“It makes me regret I ever took that Hippocratic Oath,” Trapper said. “You know the major trouble with him, Hawkeye? You never can get back at him. That’s what burns me up!”

“By an interesting coincidence,” Brother Born-Again Bob said, “my beloved daughter, Brunhilde, wants to be an opera singer.”

“*Brunhilde?”* Hawkeye asked.

“She used to be Bobby-Sue, but she felt that Brunhilde sounded more like an opera singer. She’s very serious about it,” Born-Again Bob

said. “She even gave up being a cheerleader at When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder I’ll be There Bible Seminary and Junior College,” Brother Bob said.

“Is that so?” Hawkeye said.

“By another interesting coincidence,” Born-Again Bob boomed on, “I just happen to have a little picture of our Precious Little Bobby-Sue … I mean Brunhilde … with me. Would you like to see it?”

“I wouldn’t miss an opportunity like that for the world,” Hawkeye said.

Born-Again Bob produced, from the Family Heirloom Size (11 by 14 inches) Bible that he customarily carried under his arm (he sold Bibles, as sort of a sideline, and he liked to have one handy so that he could show folks all the features they were getting for only $31.95, payable in E-Z Monthly Payments) an 8-by 10-inch color photograph of his only offspring. It was the face only, and Bobby-Sue/Brunhilde was smiling at the camera. She had apparently made a futile attempt to part her mouse-brown hair in the middle. She had what appeared to be a wart between her eyes, one on each side of her nostrils, and a jumbo-size wart on her chin. She was wearing thick-lensed eyeglasses which distorted her eyes, and her grin revealed that what teeth she had left were sort of an off-green color.

“No mistaking her,” Trapper John said. “She looks just like her father.”

“I think so,” Brother Born-Again Bob said, beaming. “And she wants to be an opera singer?”

“That’s right,” Born-Again Bob said. “She tells me that the world’s greatest opera singer is Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov, and that she dreams of studying at his side.”

“Isn’t that interesting?” Hawkeye said. “And you were just saying, Dr. McIntyre, how much you regretted not being able to do for Boris the same sort of thing he does for you.”

“So I was,” Trapper John said. “Brother Born-Again, you have my word on it. We will get your daughter, and, I hope, you too, as well as Weeping Wilma, together with Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov just as soon as humanly possible.”

“The only problem,” Hawkeye said, “is how do we get them all to Paris?”

“Brother Born-Again,” Trapper said, “why don’t you go tell Weeping Wilma the good news while Dr. Pierce and I put our heads

together?”

The door closed on Born-Again Bob. There came faintly through the door the sound of laughter and a curious gurgling sound as if someone were drinking from a bottle.

When they finally came out of the study, they confessed that they hadn’t quite solved the transportation problem yet, but from their warm smiles, and the glow on their faces, Brother Born-Again Bob sensed that the problem was not going to be insurmountable. Under the circumstances, he refrained from commenting that his sniffer, which seldom erred, had again detected the aroma of distilled spirits.

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*OceanofPDF.com*

## *Chapter Six*

"Jim-Boy," the appointments secretary said, sticking his head into the Oval Office, "the little Chinaman is here."

"If I told you once, Lester, I've told you a hundred times," Jim-Boy said, without smiling, "you're not supposed to go around calling U.S. Senators 'little Chinamen.' Besides, he's not a little Chinaman, he's a little Jap. Send him in."

The Honorable George H. Kamikaze, junior (and just elected) senator from the Great State of California,* entered the Oval Office with all the enthusiasm of a Prince of the Church entering a massage parlor on New York's West 42nd Street. He looked, in other words, as if he wouldn't have been at all surprised to see the heavens open and a bolt of lightning head right for him.

*(* Senator Kamikaze defeated the incumbent, Senator J. Ellwood "Jaws" Fisch in an upset. Senator Fisch made the tactical campaign error of calling in all his friends in politics and the arts from all over the country to speak in his behalf. Senator Kamikaze's successful (some said brilliant) counterstrategy was to say nothing at all, spending all of his limited campaign funds to rent billboards on which the phrase "By Their Friends, Ye Shall Know Them" was printed in large letters. It was sufficient to see Senator Fisch defeated by such a lopsided vote that the phrase "humiliating defeat" was a gross understatement.)*

"How are you, Senator?" Jim-Boy said. "Come in and set a spell. Have a boiled peanut?"

"Your emissary, sir," Senator Kamikaze said, "led me to believe I was summoned to render such assistance as I might be capable of providing in a matter of great importance to the republic."

"What did he say, Cy-Boy?" Jim-Boy asked. "All I understood was that part about Republicans, and you know we don't use language like that in here."

“He said Lester told him it was important,” the Secretary of State said.

“It is, Senator, it is,” Jim-Boy said. “But watch your language.”

“Language, sir, was my profession before I agreed, as my clear patriotic duty, to assume the less important duties I am now endeavoring to perform.”

“What did he say, Cy-Boy?”

“He said he used to be an English teacher,” the Secretary of State said.

“I’ve always had a soft spot in my heart for schoolteachers,” Jim-Boy said. “Sit down, Senator. Take off that plaid beret.”

“My headgear, sir, is a tam-o’-shanter, not a beret. A beret is a rather common means of covering the head in France. A tam-o’-shanter, on the other hand, is essentially Anglo-Saxon, specifically, Scottish, in origin. Moreover, a tam-o’-shanter has a tassel and a beret does not. I trust that I have detailed the most obvious differences between the two with sufficient clarity?”

“Yeah, sure,” Jim-Boy said. “You know the Secretary of State, Senator? And the Admiral?”

“I have that somewhat dubious privilege,” Senator Kamikaze replied.

“We’ve been sitting around talking about that speech you made, Senator,” Jim-Boy said.

“To which speech do you refer?”

“The one where you said that you regard my election as the greatest threat to our form of government in the history of the republic,” Jim-Boy said.

“I am delighted that it has been brought to your attention,” Senator Kamikaze said. “And I should welcome the opportunity to convince you of the validity of my objective conclusion.”

“What did he say, Cy?” Jim-Boy asked.

“He said he meant every word of it,” the Secretary of State translated.

“But in the same speech, Senator,” Jim-Boy went on, “you also said that you would put your personal loathing behind you and do whatever you could to get the country through what you said was certain to be the worst four years it has ever experienced. You said that, didn’t you?”

“That is a rough synopsis of my comments, yes,” Senator Kamikaze replied.

“What did he say, Cy?”

“He said he said that,” the Secretary of State replied.

“In that case, Senator, welcome to the team!”

“Let us not leap to a premature conclusion,” the senator replied. “What, exactly, is the nature of the national crisis, toward the solution of which you seek my advice and/or practical assistance?”

“What did he say?”

“He said what do you want from him and why,” the Secretary of State translated.

“Senator,” Jim-Boy said dramatically, “your country needs you!”

“Yes, I know,” the senator said. “But what does that have to do with you and me?”

“Tell me, Senator, does the name Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov mean anything to you?”

“He is the world’s greatest opera singer,” the senator said. “I have been privileged to hear him sing on many occasions.”

“See? I told you he was the kind of guy who would know,” Jim-Boy said to the Admiral and the Secretary. He turned back to the senator. “The Russian ambassador was just in here to see me, Senator. He wants to make a little deal.”

“I hope you didn’t loan him any additional funds,” the senator replied.

“Not a dime,” Jim-Boy said proudly. “Not a lousy dime. What he wants is for us to send this singer to Moscow. If we do, he’ll stop moving his armored divisions around Poland and East Germany, and, to sweeten the pot, he’ll even get What’s-his-name to stop banging his shoe on his desk at the UN and to stop calling me all those nasty names.”

“To reiterate, what has this got to do with you and me?”

“Well, when the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet himself, personally, called this guy and asked him to come to Moscow, he told him … well, you wouldn’t believe what he told him.”

“I think it would be best if I had all the details,” the senator said. Jim-Boy told him. “My sentiments exactly,” the senator said. “Even if it is, if I remember my undergraduate work in the procreation of the species *Homo sapiens,* an anatomical impossibility.”

“The Secretary and the Admiral have been going through their files, Senator, and have come up with the information that only four people in the world can make this singer do something he doesn’t want to do.”

“Indeed?”

“Indeed. The first was His Eminence, John Joseph Mulcahy, titular archbishop of Swengchan,* presently assigned to the personal staff of the Pope. We just this minute got off the phone talking to the Archbishop.”

*(* Archbishop Mulcahy served during the Korean War as a Chaplain (Captain) and was assigned to the 4077th M*A*S*H. He offered both spiritual and spirituous comfort to Maestro Korsky-Rimsakov during the period the singer was hospitalized.)*

“I gather he was unable, or, more likely, unwilling to come to your assistance?”

“He said there was no way he was going to Moscow,” Jim-Boy said. “The next name on the list is that of the singer’s sister, Madame Kristina Korsky-Rimsakov O’Reilly* of the San Francisco Opera.”

*(* Madame Kristina Korsky-Rimsakov was married to J. Robespierre O’Reilly, chairman of the board and chief executive officer of Mother O’Reilly’s Irish Stew Parlors, International. The details of their courtship and marriage have been recorded, in rather lurid detail, in M*A*S*H Goes to Las Vegas. (Pocket Books, New York.))*

“Ah, yes,” the senator said.

“You know the lady?”

“I have that great privilege,” the senator replied.

“Great,” Jim-Boy said. “How about you calling her and asking her for me?”

“Might I inquire why you do not choose to telephone her yourself?”

“I tried to,” Jim-Boy confessed. “I got her husband, Robespierre, on the line, and he said he never lets his wife talk to Democrats.”

“I could have told you that,” the senator said.

“Are you going to help us or not, Senator?”

“Hand me the telephone,” the senator replied. He began to dial a number.

“You know the number?” Jim-Boy asked, surprised.

“No,” the senator replied drily. “I am simply testing the laws of probability.” The dull buzzing of the phone could be heard throughout the

room, and then a voice came on the line. The Admiral reached over and pushed a button on the telephone which broadcast both sides of the conversation throughout the room.

"The J. Robespierre O'Reilly Residence," an English accented voice said. "This is Quincy the butler speaking."

"Senator George H. Kamikaze speaking," the senator said. "May I please speak with Madame Korsky-Rimsakov O'Reilly?"

"I'm terribly sorry, Senator," the butler replied. "Madame was already feeling rather badly when that horrid man in the White House telephoned. I'm very much afraid that Madame is now *really* indisposed."

"In that case, Quincy, let me speak to Mr. O'Reilly."

"I will endeavour to determine, Senator, if the master is available. Would you hold the line a moment, please?"

The senator took a long black cigar from his pocket, bit off the end, and put the cigar in his mouth.

"Light his cigar, Admiral," Jim-Boy ordered. "He's working for us now."

"Hey, George, is that you?" A male voice came over the speakers. "I've been trying to get you for an hour."

"How are you, Radar*?" the senator said. "You were trying to get me?"

*(* During his military service, prior to forming Mother O'Reilly's Irish Stew Parlors, International, Mr. O'Reilly served as Company Clerk of the 4077th M*A*S*H. His ability to sometimes read minds had earned him the appellation "Radar." Now, of course, only his intimates and high muckety-mucks of the fast food racket dared to so address him.)*

"I called your office, George," Radar said, "just as soon as it happened. They told me you were over in the White House. I didn't believe *that* for a minute, of course. That's one of those whatcha-call-'ems … scurrilous allegations."

"What was on your mind, Radar?"

"You wouldn't believe who called up here, George. At first I thought it was Boris playing one of his lousy practical jokes. But it was him, all right. I talked to him myself. There's no mistaking that corn-pone voice."

“As a matter of fact, Radar, I am at the White House,” the senator said.

“I’m really sorry to hear that, George;” Radar O’Reilly said. “Until you told me that, I thought you were different. But now you’re just like the rest of them—once you get elected, he stops being all those rotten things you called him during the campaign and starts being Our Distinguished Leader.”

“Radar, we must all make sacrifices for our beloved country. Certainly, you know me well enough to know how I loathe and detest being in the same room with him.”

“Then what are you doing there?”

“Our country calls us all at one time or another, Radar,” the senator said.

“I went to Korea,” Radar said. “Now it’s somebody else’s turn.”

“At the moment, to be specific, it’s calling Boris.”

“Boris? Don’t be silly. The only reason he got an honorable discharge the first time was because he had all those medals.*”

*(* During his military service, Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov (a/k/a Bob Alexander) was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, the Silver Star, two Bronze Stars and five Purple Hearts, as well as the Korea Order of the Tae-Guk. He was never awarded, however, the Good Conduct Medal, nor was he ever promoted above Private First Class.)*

“They don’t want him to go back in the army, Radar,” the senator said. “They want him to go to Moscow.”

“There’s no way he’s going to do that willingly,” Radar said. “At least, not unless they give him back Uncle Sergei’s theater and fifty years’ back rent.”

“I thought perhaps we might prevail upon Kris to intercede in the matter,” the senator said.

“For a Democrat? You’ve got to be kidding, George.”

“I am solemnly informed it’s quite important.”

“You mean he’s not smiling?”

“When he informed me of this matter, I couldn’t see as much as a bicuspid,” the senator said.

“Well, then, maybe I better ask Kris,” Radar said. “She was well on the road to recovery before El Teetho called up—then she got sick to her

stomach again."

"That's certainly understandable," the senator said. "But I would be grateful if you would bring the matter up with her."

"Hold on, George," Radar said. "Hey, Kris, are you still throwing up, or can you talk to George? You won't believe where he's calling from, and what he wants."

"Is that you, George?" A gentle feminine voice came on the line. "Did Robespierre tell you who telephoned here before?"

"As a matter of fact, Kris, I'm with the individual to whom you refer at this very moment."

"Oh, George, tell me you *haven't* gone over to the enemy!"

"I am here under the flag of truce," the senator said. "It is what is known as making a sacrifice for one's beloved country."

"I suppose you're right," she said. "But couldn't you have done it over the telephone?"

"The question is moot," the senator replied. "I am here. The next question is how can we get Boris to go to Moscow?"

"If they're not willing to give him Uncle Sergei's theater back, I'm afraid he won't go."

"You-know-who told me this is a matter of importance to the country, Kris. He has to go. It is our nonpartisan duty to get him there, theater or no theater."

"I see. Well, if you say so, George. There's no way that I could make him go, even if I could—I'm really sick. Radar made some of his Mother O'Reilly's Argentine chili last night, and that always knocks me out for a week or more. Have you thought of Archbishop Mulcahy?"

"The archbishop refuses to go," the senator replied.

"Then that leaves you with only one choice," Kris replied. "Hawkeye and Trapper John."

"I don't believe I know the gentlemen to whom you refer."

"Boris generally calls Hawkeye the 'Sainted Chancre Mechanic' and Trapper John the 'Pecker Checker.' "

"Now that you mention it, I do recall hearing the names," the senator said.

"I'm sure that if they asked Boris, he'd go," Kris said. "They saved his life in Korea."

"Well, we'll get in touch with this."

“There’s only one small problem, George,” Kris said.

“Which is?”

“Neither Hawkeye nor Trapper John like You-know-who any better than we do. Perhaps it would be best if you didn’t mention his name. If you do, they’re liable to refuse.”

“I understand perfectly, Kris, and thank you so much.”

“Anytime, George,” Kris said. “And I won’t tell a soul, I promise, where you called from.”

“Thank you, Kris,” the senator said. “There are those who wouldn’t understand.”

He replaced the telephone in its cradle.

“Presuming that you are capable of shelling boiled peanuts and eavesdropping simultaneously, sir,” the senator said, “a recapitulation of my conversation with Madame Korsky-Rimsakov O’Reilly would be redundant.”

“What did he say?” Jim-Boy asked.

“He said you heard it,” the Secretary of State replied.

“What have we got on these two guys, Hawkeye and Trapper John?” Jim-Boy asked.

“There is an extensive file on them in the Absolutely Top Secret Papers of the former Secretary of State, sir,” the Secretary of State said. “Unfortunately, it’s in Latin, and it will take some time to translate.”

“Give them to me,” the senator said. “My Latin is fairly fluent. Not as fluent as my Russian and my Greek, but more fluent than, say, my Urdu and my Pakistani.”

“Smartass,” the Admiral said under his breath.

“Give him the file,” Jim-Boy ordered.

“He doesn’t have a security clearance,” the Admiral protested.

“He does now. Senator, you are herewith and hereafter declared a nonthreat to the security of the nation. You can read the file.”

The Senator spent the next fifteen minutes reading the file, alternating wide grins and gasps of shock and surprise with little chuckles and an infrequent guffaw. Finally, he wiped the smile from his face and turned to Jim-Boy.

“My first reaction, which you would think of as a gut-belly feeling, is to permit you to enlist the services of these two gentlemen in getting Mr. Korsky-Rimsakov to Moscow,” he said. “But I realize that emotion is

partisan in nature, because if you did so, you would be back counting peanuts in about three weeks. Therefore, I offer this nonpartisan advice: Whatever you do, don't send Drs. Pierce and McIntyre to Russia with Mr. Korsky-Rimsakov."

"I don't have any choice in the matter," Jim-Boy said. "Those are the last two names on the list."

"Don't ever say that I didn't warn you," the senator said.

"I have had three of my brilliant innovative ideas," Jim-Boy said.

"I was afraid of something like that," the senator said.

"The first thought is that I will personally talk to them … little people like that, you know, when I talk to them … and explain the situation. I feel sure that they will volunteer to come to the aid of their country in its hour of need. And if they don't, of course, there's always the IRS."

"Good thinking, sir," the Admiral said.

"My second brilliant innovative thought is the matter of an official escort for them. We can't send you, Cy-Boy. We know what happens when you're off alone with the Russians. Before I know it, you've agreed to give them General Motors. So you're out. And the Admiral is out, too. They don't like admirals. What we need is a high-ranking public official, say a senator—and not an ordinary run-of-the-mill senator, either, but a smart one—one who speaks Russian, for instance …"

"Not on your life," Senator Kamikaze said. "There's a limit to what even someone like me is willing to do in the way of sacrifices for his country."

"Of course, you don't have to go," Jim-Boy said. "I would understand completely. Just as I'm sure those right-wing lunatics who voted you into office would understand what you were doing here with me all afternoon and into the evening. Confessing the error of your ways and begging forgiveness."

"I did no such thing!" Senator Kamikaze said, righteously indignant.

"I know that, Senator, and you know that, but people sometimes get the wrong idea. And you can just imagine what they're going to think when I have you named an Honorary Democrat."

"You wouldn't!" Senator Kamikaze said, horror in his voice.

"I would, too, unless you agree to go to Moscow with this singer."

"Here I am, in office less than a year, and already I'm compromising my principles," the senator said. "There must be a special virus in

Washington.”

“You do this for me, Senator, and I promise no one will ever know that you ever talked to me.”

“I’ll have to have that in writing,” the senator replied.

“Now that’s settled, we can turn to my third brilliant innovative idea of how a country should be run,” Jim-Boy said.

“I’m all ears, sir,” the Admiral said.

“Yeah, I know,” Jim-Boy said. “But we weren’t talking about you.” He turned to the senator. “You’re not going alone, Senator. I mean with just these two doctors and this singer. If the Russians want culture, I’ll give them culture!”

“What, exactly, do you have in mind, sir?” the Secretary of State asked.

“It’s actually a ‘who’ I have in mind, Cy-Boy,” Jim-Boy said.

“Who, exactly, do you have in mind, sir?”

“Shur-lee Strydent!” Jim-Boy announced dramatically. “How does that grab you?”

“You are, I am forced to conclude,” the senator said, “making reference to Shur-lee Strydent, the world’s ugliest movie star?”

“Bite your tongue, Senator!” Jim-Boy snapped. “I’m willing to put up with a lot from you in the interest of world peace, but when you start casting aspersions against Shur-lee Strydent, you’re skiing on thin ice.”

“That’s skating, I believe, sir,” the Admiral said.

“Whatever,” Jim-Boy said. “If Shur-lee Strydent can pack movie theaters all across this country with her inimitable style of acting and singing, imagine what she can do in Red Square. It’ll make their May Day parade look like a convention of steamship salesmen.”

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## *Chapter Seven*

It is not true, as some suggest, that Shur-lee Strydent and her phenomenal success in the entertainment industry is just one of those weird things that happen from time to time in an industry which itself is more than a little weird.

Miss Strydent is not, certainly, the ugliest performer ever to have attained fame or fortune. Neither is she possessed of the most blood-curdling singing voice ever to reach the public from the silver screen or over that electronic marvel known as the cathode ray, or boob, tube. And, without digging very far, it is easy to turn up dramatic actresses who are equally unconvincing (or in two cases, even less convincing) than the woman known to the world as "Shur-lee Strydent, Star of Stars."

But never before in the long and sordid history of the motion picture star system has there been incorporated in one female performer such an overwhelming lack of talent, such a forbidding anatomical physiognomy, and such an ability to drive strong men to drink by "singing." Shur-lee Strydent was born Gertrude Rumplemayer to poor and, to tell the truth, grossly dishonest parents ten years before the date given in the *The Official Biography of Shur-lee Strydent, Star of Stars.* That is to say, she was born in 1937 *(not* 1947) in the borough of Richmond, of the City of New York, which is also known to the cognoscenti as Staten Island.

By the time she was nine years old, Siegfried Rumplemayer, her father, had been cashiered from the New York City Sanitation Department after having been found guilty in a departmental trial of diverting departmental equipment (specifically, his garbage-can-on-wheels) to personal use.

For more years than the Public Relations Division of the Department of Sanitation likes to recall, Siegfried Rumplemayer had used the proud white coat, garbage-can-on-wheels, and push broom of the Sanitation Department as nothing more than a cover for his true avocation —that of high-class dog-napper.

One of the more interesting customs of the inhabitants of the Borough of Manhattan of the City of New York* is to possess dogs. The

reason for this is probably because it is a pleasant feeling, indeed, to return to one's apartment after a hard day out there in the jungle to find a furry friend blissfully wagging its tail at the sight of one.

*(* The Borough of Manhattan is the island which the Dutch bought from the Indians for $24. The other boroughs (Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island) are generally regarded as unimportant, especially by people who live in (or on) Manhattan.)*

The furry friends of Manhattan, however, like their counterparts in, say, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, require some things—like bushes, trees, grass, and fireplugs—which are in far shorter supply in Manhattan than they are in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. If every New Yorker possessed of a dog suddenly descended on the streets of Manhattan with said hound on a leash, a traffic jam of monumental proportions would occur.

This situation gave birth to one of the more interesting occupations to be found in the *Handbook of Occupations:* Dog Walker. A dog walker, as the title suggests, is a person (frequently a highly perfumed gentleman of rather exquisite grace) who earns his living by collecting a dozen or so dogs and taking them all for a walk at once.

It was in this that Siegfried Rumplemayer saw his chance to augment his income. He reasoned (correctly, as it turned out) that if people were willing to part with hard cash so that their furry friends could have access to the bushes, trees, and fire hydrants of Central Park, they certainly would be willing to part with even larger sums of cash should their furry friends become "lost."

In Siegfried's defense, it must be reported that he had not, at first, included little Gertrude in his plans. For one thing, she was only four, and for another, truth to tell, he regarded his first (and only) born as a mean little kid who couldn't be trusted as far as he could throw her. The very first thing that Little Gerty had done with her very first tooth was to bite her daddy on the nose, and things had gone down hill from there.

But as the dog-napping plans were taking final form in Siegfried's head, an incident involving their neighbor lady on Sunny Dale Avenue, Tottenville, Staten Island, occurred. The neighbor lady, whose name has unfortunately been lost to posterity, was a cat freak. She had cats of all sizes running wild around her property. One dark, dismal, rainy evening when Siegfried came home from pushing his garbage-can-on-wheels through

Central Park, he was greeted by the neighbor lady (also known as the Cat Lady) who was in a state of high excitement and hysterical indignation.

"I want to see you, Rumplemayer," she screamed.

"It's Grass, Path, and Walkway Sanitary Technician Rumplemayer to you, Cat Lady," Siegfried replied.

"Do you know what your little monster has been up to, Rumplemayer?" Cat Lady screamed.

"Which little monster do you mean, Cat Lady?"

"Dirty Little Gerty is who I mean," she shouted. "How many little monsters do you have, anyway?"

"I'm a busy man, Cat Lady," Siegfried had replied. "Get to the point."

"You know that pack of wild dogs that runs around the swamp?"

"What about them?"

"Your Dirty Little Gerty has been feeding my precious pussy cats to them, that's what about them!"

"I don't quite follow you, Cat Lady," Siegfried said.

"I'll explain it in simple terms," she said. "That little monster of yours has been catching my precious pussy cats in a potato sack and then carrying them down to the swamp and letting them loose so those terrible dogs can chase them."

"Thank you for bringing the situation to my attention, Cat Lady," Siegfried replied with dignity. "I'll have a word with the little … with Gertrude-Darling."

"You should take a horse-whip to her, that's what you should do!"

"Unfortunately, there are laws against that," Siegfried said. "And Little Gerty knows all of them."

"She's a vicious little monster, that's what she is," Cat Lady said.

"She does favor her mother," Siegfried said. "I'll look into the matter."

By the time he had climbed the stairs to the third-floor rear apartment he thought of as his little place in the country, Siegfried had realized that one of his major dog-napping problems (how to get the mutts away from the pansies) had been solved.

"Gerty-Baby," he said, "how would Daddy's little darling like to go to work with Daddy tomorrow?"

“Not on your life,” Little Gerty replied, with the lisp that would one day become as world famous as Jimmy Carter’s choppers.

“Daddy’s heard about the fun you’ve been having with Cat Lady’s kitty cats,” Siegfried said.

“The old witch squealed on me, did she?” Little Gerty said, with a snarl. “I’ll push her wheelchair down the stairs for that!”

‘I’ve got a better idea than that,” Siegfried said, and he explained what he had in mind in some detail.

“Daddy-Dear, that’s an absolutely rotten idea,” Little Gerty squealed gleefully. “I’ll do it!”

The very next day, it being a Saturday, Little Gerty went with her daddy to work. The ticket taker on the Staten Island Ferry informed the pair of them that taking three cats in a burlap sack aboard an official ferryboat of the City of New York was a no-no. For a moment, Siegfried was stumped, but Little Gerty rose to the challenge.

“One more word out of you, tomato nose,” she snarled, “and I’ll tell that fat cop over there that you offered me a Hershey Bar and a dime to play show-and-tell with you.”

Little Gerty waited at the Fifth Avenue and Sixty-third Street entrance to Central Park until Siegfried, by then in uniform and pushing his garbage-can-on-wheels, showed up. Two of the three cats in the burlap sack were stashed in a closet of a Gentleman’s Rest Facility to which Siegfried had a key. Cradling the third tabby in her arms, Little Gerty skipped down the curving path ahead of her daddy until they came across what they were looking for: A ten-dog strong pack of furry friends, ranging in size from a Chihuahua to a St. Bernard, being taken on their morning constitutional by an exquisitely graceful young man in purple pedal-pushers and a yellow beret. They were on a collision course.

“Get out of my way, you nasty sanitation person, you,” the young gentleman said. “Or I’ll sic my doggies on you!”

“Oh,” Little Gerty yelped, throwing the cat at him. “I dropped my pussy cat!”

The last seen of either the pussy cat, the exquisitely graceful young man, or the St. Bernard was as the latter chased the former through the rowboat concession on the shores of picturesque Central Park Lake. By that time, Siegfried and Little Gerty had the Chihuahua, a toy French poodle,

and a sad-eyed beagle firmly stashed in the garbage-can-on-wheels and were heading out of the park.

It had been Siegfried's original intention simply to telephone the dog's owner and announce that for a suitable reward the owner could have his furry friend back. But Little Gerty had showed such a natural inclination for the business that they improved on the basic plan.

He rented a cheap basement room on the West Side and telephoned the furry friend's owners to announce that his little girl had found their animal and that they could have it back simply by coming to pick it up. When the distraught dog owners arrived at the basement room, they found their furry friend snuggled up close to Little Gerty,* who had been equipped with both a set of dark glasses of the type worn by blind persons and a striped cane. There was also a pair of crutches leaning against the wall. Siegfried then cued his daughter.

*(* The means of getting the dog to snuggle up close and whimper had been Little Gerty's contribution, and it had been simplicity itself. The dogs were fed, but instead of using water to make that Yummy-Yummy Gravy we see on TV, Rumplemayer pere et fille used bourbon whiskey. Since most pet owners are not at all familiar with the sound* ***a*** *hungover dog makes, the deception worked perfectly.)*

"Poor little blind daughter, your doggie-woggie's real owner has come for it."

Little Gerty began with a whimper not much louder than the one the hungover hound was making, but soon worked herself into a mournful frenzy. The furry friend's owners would then either come up with a reward four or five times as large as they had intended to bestow or would announce that they couldn't possibly have the coldness of heart to separate their dog from the poor little blind girl on crutches. If this latter situation developed, Siegfried would say that what the child really needed was a seeing-eye dog, that they had been scraping their pennies together to buy her one and were only $124.80 short of the purchase price. Two out of three soft-hearted dog owners handed over the $124.80.

(There were those who came up with the $124.80 and still refused to take their own dog back. These animals were transported back to Staten Island, where Siegfried "returned them to nature's paradise" by turning them loose near the swamp and the pack of wild dogs.)

Over the three years before Siegfried was caught and brought before the Sanitation Department's Court of Honor for conduct unbecoming a Grass, Path, and Walkway Sanitary Technician, father and daughter honed their act to a fine art. Their downfall came when the neighbor lady became suspicious about the dwindling size of her herd and employed a private detective to investigate the matter.

The trial itself went down in Sanitation Department annals as one of the darkest blots on the Sanitation Department's previously spotless escutcheon. Although there was no doubt whatever in anyone's mind that Siegfried Rumplemayer had, as charged, wrongly, illegally, and with malice aforethought diverted his garbage-can-on-wheels to his personal profit, the court martial board was unable to reach a unanimous verdict.

"A scoundrel like that," one court member said to the *Daily News's* Inquiring Photographer, "certainly deserved the greatest punishment provided by law. But I simply couldn't find it in myself to vote that way, with that horribly ugly child begging for her daddy's freedom on her knees that way."

A compromise was reached. Siegfried was subjected to the public humiliation of being drummed out of the Sanitation Department in Times Square. As the Sanitation Department Band played the "Rogue's March," the brass buttons were snipped one by one from his uniform, and his Grass, Path, and Walkway insignia ripped from his sleeve. But that was all the punishment he received.

The furor quickly died down, after a spate of angry editorials in *The New York Times* and the *Village Voice* about the appalling lack of moral fiber in the Sanitation Department's upper echelons.

Father and daughter were crushed. Not only was their moonlight income (which had been sufficient for them to travel to Europe and to buy an eleventh-floor deluxe condominium on Florida's Gold Coast above Miami) gone forever, but the fun in their lives was gone too. Never again would they see the wonderful sight of the pansies being dragged through the flora of Central Park by baying dogs in hot pursuit of one of the Cat Lady's precious pussy cats.

But they were resilient. Within two months, they were back on the streets of Manhattan—this time with a wheelchair. Little Gerty, wearing her dark glasses, pushed her beloved Daddy back and forth through Times Square while she sang at the top of her lungs the song about the rainbow

which Judy Garland had made famous in the motion picture *The Wizard of Oz*-

It generally took no more than two full days of pushing (noon till 11:00 p.m., Little Gerty's Daddy insisting that a growing girl needed her sleep) before Daddy's battered old Sanitation Department cap had been filled with enough donations to permit them to take the Eastern Airlines Champagne and Bagels flight to their Florida condominium for the rest of the week.

The years passed. Dirty Little Gerty blossomed, if that word fits, into young womanhood, and Darling Daddy, it must be reported, acquired a rather disgusting affinity for the bottle. No longer was he willing to put up with being pushed through Times Square with his hat in his lap. He insisted now on stopping off for ever longer periods, for refreshment in various watering places along Forty-second Street.

"You don't really need me, child," he said to Dirty Gerty. "All you really have to do is stand behind the wheelchair and sing 'Over the Rainbow.' People will put money in the cap, whether or not it's in my lap."

And for another year, Dirty Gerty did as her Daddy told her, taking such pleasure as she could from saying rude things to passersby who didn't drop coins or bills in the hat, but gradually she came to realize that Darling Daddy was taking advantage of her. She was doing all the work, and he was drinking up all the profits.

He was not even willing to compromise when she discussed the matter with him. All she asked for was a fair shake, that one night a week he sit in the wheelchair and sing "Over the Rainbow" while she made the tour of the watering places. When he turned her down, and coldly, she knew that she would soon have to strike off on her own.

One night, when she was barely twenty, she gathered the necessary courage (mostly by helping herself liberally to the bottle of Old White Stagg blended Kentucky bourbon Darling Daddy kept in the wheelchair against unforeseen exigencies) and left Darling Daddy, once and for all, in the Times Square Topless and Bottomless Steak and Chop House.

Knowing only that she had to go away, but not knowing where to go, she fled Times Square for the unknown. When she came to Madison Avenue, she liked the smell, and she set up shop, so to speak, outside a tall building sheathed in black marble. She did not then know that the building housed the international headquarters of the Amalgamated Broadcasting

System. She knew only that from it emerged, starting at approximately eight-thirty at night, a steady stream of well-dressed gentlemen who, to judge from their unsteady gait and bloodshot eyes, had turned to John Barleycorn to give them the strength to get through the night.

While it is true that some of these gentlemen (at least until they got her in the light and got a good look at her) did have various business propositions to make to her, most of them were in such condition that all they wanted from the female sex was what Dirty Gerty gave them— a full-blast rendition of "Over the Rainbow."

From the first night, there were enough coins and bills in Darling Daddy's hat to permit a well-earned night's rest in a small suite at the Americana Hotel. She never returned to Staten Island again. She put that part of her life behind her and from that moment devoted her life to what she thought of as improving her art

By conducting what is known along Madison Avenue as a demographic survey, she learned that her audience contained a substantial percentage of people of the Jewish, black, and Irish persuasions. To meet the musical tastes of this part of her audience, she added "Oh, How We Danced on the Night We Were Wed,"* "Jesus Loves Me."** and "I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen"*** to her repertoire. From that moment, Dirty Gerty Rumplemayer was able to claim that she offered her art to the whole world without regard to race, creed, color, or national origin.

*(* "Oh, How We Danced," etc., is based on an old Hebrew melody.)*

*(** It was either this or "We Shall Overcome." The conflict was resolved by the tossing of a coin. "Jesus Loves Me" won.)*

*(*** Statistics prove conclusively that 87.5 percent of all Irish males have either a mother, sister, aunt, wife, or good friend named "Kathleen.")*

It was an Irish gentleman who on one cold and windy night put Dirty Gerty Rumplemayer on step two of the ladder which eventually lifted her to international stardom.

Sean O'Casey O'Mulligan, often described as Ireland's gift to the silver screen, was in Manhattan to publicize his latest motion picture epic, a $30 million epic (some said an Arabian cowboys and indians) which had not yet had the attraction to the ticket-buying public its producers had anticipated. Sean O'Casey O'Mulligan was a tall, blond, blue-eyed, and very handsome chap whose appeal to the gentle sex was well known. The producers logically concluded that his appearance on the ABS talk show

“Merd Johnson and His Guests” would give the old box office a shot in the arm, and O’Mulligan was imported from Ireland to exchange jolly banter with Mr. Johnson on his program.

The producers, however, failed to either mention or, if they mentioned it, certainly to properly state Sean O’Casey O’Mulligan’s little foibles. For one thing, without his eyeglasses poor Sean could not see his belly button in clear focus. For another, the magnetic attraction Sean produced in the gentle sex was matched only by the magnetic attraction between Sean and a bottle containing spirituous liquor.

Furthermore, despite his unquestioned thespian talents, Sean O’Casey O’Mulligan was terrified at the prospect of appearing in public without a script. On the day in question, Sean began taking aboard liquid courage at approximately eleven o’clock in the morning, and by half-past four in the afternoon was apparently unable (if not unable, then certainly unwilling) to rise from the leather couch in the Plaza Hotel’s Oak Room. This situation was brought to the attention of Mr. Merd Johnson.

Although he had not admitted this, the truth of the matter was that Mr. Johnson had been looking rather eagerly forward to having Mr. O’Casey O’Mulligan on his program, his ratings having sagged practically out of sight in recent weeks. He immediately hopped in his limousine and was carried to the Plaza. As soon as he walked in the room, he decided that he could snatch a television triumph from the jaws of disaster, for Mr. O’Casey O’Mulligan was not drinking alone. With him was his long-time crony, often described as Wales’ Gift to the Stage and Silver Screen, the actor Birdwell Richards. Mr. Richards, when Mr. Johnson walked in, was standing on the bar, holding one of the Oak Room’s glistening spittons in his right hand, and delivering the “Alas! poor Yorick, I knew him….” speech from one of Mr. William Shakespeare’s more popular works.

All he had to do, Mr. Johnson reasoned, was to exercise sufficient charm upon both of them to (a) get them off the sauce and (b) get them to the studio. Having both Sean O’Casey O’Mulligan and Birdwell Richards on his show at one time (Mr. Richards having often expressed an absolute unwillingness to appear on what he somewhat rudely referred to as the boob tube) would not only cause his ratings to soar, but place Mr. Johnny Carson in the position of having to eat his heart out.

Mr. Johnson issued instructions to one of his lackeys to have the network immediately start making announcements, on the hour and half

hour, to the effect that a very special, superstar-status guest would appear that very night on the “Merd Johnson Show” with Mr. Sean O’Casey O’Mulligan. This spot announcement was to be immediately followed by a special bulletin from the ABS News Department that the actor Birdwell Richards was in town, presumably to be with his long-time professional associate and dear friend, the actor Sean O’Casey O’Mulligan. Twelve-year-old mentality or not, Merd Johnson felt his audience would get the message. Then, fixing his broadest smile on his face, he strode across the room and cheerfully greeted the both of them.

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## *Chapter Eight*

At approximately 9:00 p.m. an understandably uncomfortable senior assistant producer entered the offices of the network chairman of the board, genuflected, and announced that he had just received word that Merd Johnson had last been seen rather in his cups (at least, that was the logical conclusion to be drawn; otherwise why would he have been swinging from the crystal chandelier in the Oak Room crying "Me Tarzan, you Jane!" to an enthralled group of fans and passersby) and there was some doubt that he would be, as the senior assistant producer euphemistically chose to put it, "in the proper mental attitude to go on the air."

The chairman of the board thought but a moment before issuing orders.

"Don Rhotten* was just in here begging for a chance to show his talents in something besides the news," he said. "Tell him to stand by to stand in for Merd Johnson."

*(*Don Rhotten (pronounced Row-Ten), who thought of himself as America's most beloved young news anchorperson, had achieved national fame as the bottom half on "Waldo Maldemer and the Evening News, starring Don Rhotten." Details of Mr. Rhotten's climb to the upper pinnacles of television success have been recorded in M*A*S*H Goes to Las Vegas, M*A*S*H Goes to Morocco, M*A*S*H Goes to Vienna, M*A*S*H Goes to Hollywood, and M*A*S*H Goes to Montreal, all published in the public interest by Pocket Books, New York. Parental guidance is advised.)*

The word was passed down the chain of command to Mr. Rhotten, and he spent the next hour and fifty-five minutes making sure that every last hair of his rug was in place, that his caps glistened like polished ivory, and that his Paul Newman blue contact lenses were not only in place, but that he and they and the teleprompter (sometimes known as the "idiot board") were in the proper juxtaposition. Without a script, Mr. Rhotten was even more speechless than Mr. O'Casey O'Mulligan.

Further bulletins from lackeys on the scene at the Oak Room indicated that there was very little chance at all that either Mr. Johnson or

his guest, Mr. O'Casey O'Mulligan, would be able to make it out of the Oak Room, much less all the way across town to the studio, so a standby set of famous people was alerted to replace them on the show.

"I really hate to do it," the chairman said. "God knows his ego is insufferable as it is, but we can pretend that the very special, superstar-status guest we've been announcing all night on the hour and half-hour is Rhotten himself."

The chairman, and indeed all those under him, had, however, underestimated the degree to which the most sacred tradition of the Old Vic and Stratford-upon-Avon infested the blood of Mssrs. Sean O'Casey O'Mulligan and Birdwell Richards.

At 10:45 p.m., in other words, fifteen minutes before Mr. O'Mulligan's scheduled appearance on the "Merd Johnson Show," Mr. O'Mulligan suddenly sat erect.

"Gadzooks, Birdwell!" he said, with remarkable clarity of pronunciation for someone who had ingested as much spirituous liquor as he had. "The very honor of the theatrical profession is at stake! Get our friend down from the chandelier!"

"What has that," Birdwell Richards replied somewhat thickly, "to do with the honor of the theatrical profession?"

"The show, dear boy, must go on!" O'Mulligan said, getting somewhat unsteadily to his feet.

"Indeed it must!" Richards replied. His pronunciation now was quite impeccable. "To which show do you refer, old companion of the boards?"

"In fifteen minutes," O'Mulligan said, "Tarzan up there goes on the air with me as his honored guest. And I intend to be there, or my name isn't Sean O'Casey O'Mulligan." He then bent over, picked up a spittoon, and threw it at Merd Johnson to attract his attention and to get him down from the chandelier.

"Good shot!" Birdwell Richards cried as the spittoon struck Mr. Merd Johnson on the head, causing him to lose what was left of his conscious condition and to tumble from the chandelier into one of the Oak Room's fortunately softly upholstered couches.

"You're just going to have to tag along, old boy," O'Mulligan said. "Tarzan is out like a light, and he's far too fat for me to manage all alone."

"I will, of course, make any sacrifice for our beloved profession," Birdwell Richards said. "On the other hand, bear in mind that there are

limits to everything. I won't be forced to perform, will I?"

Dragging Merd Johnson by his feet, his head bumping along the polished marble corridors, Mr. O'Mulligan and Mr. Richards made their way through the lobby to the entrance, where Mr. Johnson's limousine and chauffeur patiently waited.

"To the studio," Mr. O'Mulligan cried. "And don't spare the horses!"

En route to the studio, Mr. Johnson regained consciousness and Mr. Birdwell Richards lost it. When they pulled up outside the studio, studio personnel rushed outside to see just who it was who had driven up on the sidewalk and was obviously seeking entrance to the sacred precincts it was their privilege to guard against the riffraff.

Sean O'Casey O'Mulligan emerged from the car, stood weaving on the sidewalk, and then cocked his handsome head to one side.

"Hark," he declaimed. "A lark!"

"A what?" Mr. Johnson inquired.

"A lark, you moron, a lark!" He reached inside the limousine and pulled Birdwell Richards out and stood him on his feet. "Straighten up, Birdwell," he said. "And pay attention!"

Having seen the limousine arrive, Dirty Gerty Rumplemayer had been fully prepared, as she thought of it, to put it in high gear.

"I'll take you home, again, Kathleen!" she wailed, putting her all in it.

"Hark, Birdwell," O'Mulligan repeated, his voice on the edge of breaking up. "A lark." A tear ran down his leonine cheeks. "My mother's name was Kathleen," he said. "God rest her soul!"

A tear ran down Birdwell Richards' face, too. "I once knew a Kathleen," he said. "A delightful female. Second hoofer from the right, third row, in the Folies Bergeres." Sean O'Casey O'Mulligan walked unsteadily over to where Dirty Gerty was singing.

"How would you like to perform for us, my little Irish nightingale?" he inquired.

Some time before, as a result of having business propositions made so often to her by the gentlemen exiting the black marble-sheathed building, Dirty Gerty had given the matter some deep thought. She had finally decided that she would be amenable to a proposition providing the offer made was (a) large enough moneywise and (b) that the offerer appealed to

offeree. Condition (b) was obviously met, and then some, by Sean O'Casey O'Mulligan. He was, after all, one of the world's most handsome men, and Dirty Gerty's heart was all aflutter just being this close to him. That left condition (a).

"What's in it for me?" she asked.

"Remunerationwise, you mean, my wild Irish lark?"

"Money is what I mean, handsome," Dirty Gerty replied.

"Birdwell," O'Mulligan ordered, "see how much money Tarzan has with him."

Birdwell went through Merd Johnson's pockets and came up with a sheath of bills.

He gave them to O'Mulligan, who extended them to Dirty Gerty. "I trust this will be sufficient, my little angel?" he asked.

"What do I have to do, and who to?" Dirty Gerty said, snatching the money from his hand and stuffing it into her upper undergarment.

Birdwell Richards, whose little nap on the way from the Plaza to the studio had restored at least part of his faculties, now made his contribution.

"Certainly, my dear fellow, you're not going to give this physiognomously fantastic female with the sepsinously strident voice all that money?"

"You're drunk, Birdwell," O'Mulligan replied. "That's the trouble with you Welsh. One or two lousy quarts and you're blotto! Of course I am. She's going to sing for us on Tarzan's talk show. What did you say your name was, you lilting Irish lassie?"

"*Sing* for us?" Birdwell Richards said. "I suppose that would be the lesser of the two evils."

Dirty Gerty Rumplemayer, whose formal education had ended the day Daddy Dear had carried her and three of the neighbor lady's cats to Central Park, did not know what "physiognomously fantastic" meant and hadn't the foggiest idea what "sepsinously* strident" implied, but she liked the sound of the latter.

*(* Sepsin: n. A ptomaine causing septic poison; hence, adj. sepsinously = poisonously.)*

"Strydent," she said. "Whatever-he-said Strydent."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Didn't you remember what you said?" Dirty Gerty demanded of Birdwell Richards.

“Scher-tainly, I remember,” Birdwell replied. “You’re not accusing me of being drunk, are you?”

“My name,” Dirty Gerty Rumplemayer said, “is Shur-lee Strydent!”

“Now that that’s settled,” O’Mulligan said, “come along! The show must go on!”

Shur-lee Strydent’s career might have died, as they say, aborning, right there had not Mr. Merd Johnson insisted, when signing his renewal contract, that he be provided with a key to the executive elevator, for certainly the staunch security force would not have allowed them on one of the other elevators.

But he had the key, and they rose to the fortieth floor of the building, emerging backstage on the set of the “Merd Johnson and His Guests” show. Somewhat confused as to the time (he had both dozed awhile on the chandelier and then been unconscious for about fifteen minutes after being struck on the head with the spittoon), he somehow got the idea that he had arrived just in time before the program went on the air. It had, in fact, been on the air, and thus into 12,098,677 homes nationwide and in Canada, for about ten minutes.

A commercial had just ended, and Don Rhotten, in his familiar dulcet tones, was in the process of introducing the next act, Madame Hermione and Her Delightful Dobermans, when Merd Johnson sort of lurched out on the stage.

“What the hell’s going on here?” he said. (An alert technician in the control room skillfully bleeped out the “hell,” so what the audience heard was “What the bleep’s going on here?” They were thus free to choose any adjective from “heck” down in the scatological lexicon.)

“Why, hello there, Merd,” Don Rhotten said. “We didn’t think you were going to make it.”

“What the bleep are you talking about, mush mouth? And who the bleep turned you loose from the bleeping newsroom?”

There is a standard emergency procedure for situations like this. A tape recording of laughter is kept in readiness. When emergency button number one is pushed, the folks out there in TV land are provided with gales of hysterical laughter, cleverly letting them know that what has happened is not only on the schedule, but fantastically funny, even if they themselves are not quite bright enough to get the point.

When Merd Johnson heard the hysterical laughter, it began to dawn on him that something was amiss. He looked out over the footlights and saw the audience. At that point one of Madame Hermione's Delightful Dobermans mistook his trousers leg for a fire hydrant, a sight which genuinely and without subterfuge delighted the audience. They began to laugh and shriek, nearly as loudly as the tape of canned laughter.

Merd Johnson looked down at his leg.

"Get those bleeping dogs off my set!" he screamed. He grabbed the microphone from Don Rhotten, and, swinging it wildly around his head, chased Mr. Rhotten from the stage. "I'll kill you, you show-stealing bleep!"

At that point, Happy Hal Harrington, his commercial reader, foil, and professional Irishman sensed that something was wrong. He turned his normally dour and saturnine looks into the look of jolly merriment that was his stock in trade and took the microphone away from Merd.

Finally appearing to get control of his laughter, he said, "Well, old pal, what have you got for us tonight?"

Merd Johnson had regained some control of himself by then.

"Hi there, Happy Hal," he said. "That was certainly fun, wasn't it? How about a big round of applause for my dear, dear friend, America's most beloved young television news anchorperson, Don Rhotten?"

"That's pronounced Row-ten, Merd," Happy Hal corrected him.

"Not by me it isn't," Merd Johnson said.

"Tell us all about this superstar-status surprise guest you've promised the folks, Merd," Happy Hal said.

"Oh, sure," Merd said, looking just a little confused. "The superstar-status surprise guest. Ladies and gentlemen …" he began but he got no further.

Dirty Gerty Rumplemayer marched up to the microphone, sent Happy Hal and Merd flying with deft movements of her well-upholstered hips, and blew a kiss at the audience.

"Hi, there," she cooed. "I'm Shur-lee Strydent and I'm here to make you adore me!" It had come to her, in something akin to divine revelation, that this was what she had been waiting for all her life—the chance to be adored.

There was no detectable response to this at all from the audience, but the folks out there in TV land never knew this, for an alert technician in

the control room pushed emergency button number two, which activated tape number two—enthusiastic applause (with whistles and shouts).

"Thank you so much," Shur-lee Strydent cooed. "You're so kind to little me. Now if the nice boys in the band will be so good as to back me up, I will try to make you happy with my first selection, that old favorite 'I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen.' "

As Miss Strydent sang her first number, Sean O'Casey O'Mulligan and Birdwell Richards, arm in arm, marched onto the set and slumped into chairs. O'Mulligan raised his head and stared in rapt fascination in the direction of Miss Strydent. A tear ran down his cheeks.

When she had finished, he got to his feet and marched over to her.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he announced, kissing her wetly on the forehead, "isn't she wonderful?"

Emergency button number two was pushed to encourage the audience.

"For my encore," Shur-lee announced, "I will do 'Oh, How We Danced on the Night We Were Wed.' "

Mr. O'Casey O'Mulligan made it back to his seat and went to sleep. Fortunately, he chose to do so holding his head up with his hand, which permitted Happy Hal Harrington to comment that it wasn't often one was privileged to see an actor of that stature and that experience overcome by emotion. He then thrust the microphone in the face of Birdwell Richards.

"And what do you think of our new superstar, Birdwell Richards?"

Mr. Richards had recovered sufficiently to be in desperate need of something to drink. But trouper to the core, he pulled himself together and enunciated, with perfect clarity and impeccable diction the following opinion:

"I can truthfully tell you, whoever you are, that I have never in my life heard someone sing who produced that reaction in me." He thereupon jumped out of his seat and ran off stage, where he threw up into a fire bucket.

The folks at home didn't see this, of course, which allowed Happy Hal to observe that Merd Johnson and ABS had again scored a big one for the good folks in TV land —a singer so unique that she had rendered the two finest actors in the world emotionally exhausted.

"Thank you so much, Happy Hal," Shur-lee Strydent said, snatching the microphone out of his hand. "And for my final number … always leave

them wanting more, I always say … I will do that beloved old religious melody, 'Jesus Loves Me.' "

By the time she concluded that number, the audience had been sufficiently conditioned (some cynics might say brainwashed) to make unnecessary the use of emergency button number two. They applauded (with whistles and cheers) of their own free will.

And a star was born.

The question was what to do with her.

At an emergency conference convened the very next morning in the rather ornate boardroom of the ABS chairman of the board, the chairman himself was waiting, tapping his perfectly manicured fingernails impatiently on the high polished oak table as his staff came into the room, genuflected, and took their seats.

"We seem to have a teensy-weensy little problem, gentlemen," he began. "We last night presented to our audience a … a *person* … ABS identified as a superstar. How this came to be, I don't yet know, but you may take my word for it, heads will roll.* But since ABS said she was a superstar, a superstar she is, for ABS never lies. The fact that in my long and distinguished career I have never seen an uglier woman or heard a more painfully sour voice is, as we say, not relevant. The question before us, which is why I asked you here for the benefit of your wise counsel, is what the hell do we do with her? I will now entertain suggestions."

*(* He was as good as his word. Before the day was over, the "Merd Johnson and His Guests" show was cancelled, and a memorandum personally signed by the chairman of the board went out to all departments and all network-owned Stations that the names of Sean O'Casey O'Mulligan and Birdwell Richards were never to be broadcast over his airwaves unless absolutely necessary, and if it was necessary, they were to be mispronounced.)*

There was a long silence in the room, as the senior executive staff looked thoughtful and wondered how they could avoid offering an opinion. Then, shockingly, the gold telephone placed before the chairman began to glow.* Eyes widened, for it was common knowledge that in all the world, only six people (the president of the United States, the chairman's wife, and his girlfriend among them) had that unlisted number.

*(* Bells, of course, were not permitted to disturb the tranquility of the boardroom.)*

The chairman himself was visibly surprised to see it start to glow. He stared at it in disbelief for a full thirty seconds before reaching for it.

"Hello," he said.

Normally, the voice of the calling party would not have been audible to anyone but the chairman, a good deal of engineering effort having been devoted to the notion that the chairman's telephone calls, on the gold phone, should be absolutely private. But this voice, which had the timbre of a piece of chalk being scraped along a slate blackboard, got through all the filters and other technical barriers without losing more than one-half a decibel. It was clearly audible throughout the boardroom.

"Clarence, baby," the piercing voice began. "I don't mind telling you I cried. In fact, that's what I called to tell you, Clarence, baby—I cried. Can you imagine that?" With visible effort, the chairman retained control of his voice and even managed to fix a rough caricature of a smile on his face.

"You are referring, I gather, Wesley, to Shur-lee Strydent?" No one in the room was surprised to see demonstrated that Wesley St. James was one of the privileged six to have access to the gold telephone. Fully 45 percent of the ABS advertising revenue came to the network from sponsors of the various daytime dramas (or soap operas) created and produced by Wesley St. James at the Wesley St. James Studios in Hollywood, California. Another 15 percent of ABS advertising revenues came from sponsors of the newest innovative wrinkle in the TV game, the Wesley St. James-ABS evening dramas (nighttime soap operas, very loosely based—the same titles were used—on great American novels).

"Who else?" Wesley St. James himself said.

"I cried a little too, Wesley," the chairman said. "As a matter of fact, we're having a little meeting right now to discuss how to deal with Shur-lee Strydent."

"It seems to me that the least you could do in the face of such talent is refer to her as *Ms.* Shur-lee Strydent," Wesley St. James said, somewhat snappishly.

"You say you cried, Wesley?"

"I started to sniffle when she sang 'I'll Take You Home Again, Kathleen,' " Wesley St. James said. "Halfway through 'Oh, How We Danced,' the tears were running unashamedly down my cheeks, and when she sang, 'Jesus Loves Me,' I wept openly," Wesley St. James said. "Right

there in my own living room. I got my popcorn soggy, that's how hard I cried."

"I cried, too, Wesley," the chairman said. This was true, but his tears were not shed for the same reasons.

"I've got to have her!" Wesley St. James said.

"Exactly how do you mean that, Wesley?" the chairman asked.

"You're a filthy-minded old man, Clarence," Wesley St. James said. "How can you even think of s-e-x in connection with that angel-voiced lady? That angel-*faced* lady?"

"Forgive me, Wesley," the chairman said. "What exactly do you have in mind?"

"How much do you want for her contract?"

"I'm sure something can be worked out," the chairman said smoothly, "between us, as friends and fellow gentlemen."

"I'm sure something can, too," Wesley St. James said. "Something mutually satisfactory. Not only do I have absolute faith in your honesty, Clarence, even if you are a filthy-minded old man, but I know how deeply it would pain you if I moved my shows over to, say, CBS."

"I'll get back to you just as soon as I have a look at her contract, Wesley," the chairman said.

"Take your time, Clarence," Wesley St. James said. "Anytime in the next ninety minutes."

"*Ciao,* Wesley," the chairman said. There was only a click as Mr. St. James's telephone was replaced in its receiver. Wesley St. James was far too busy a man, far too important a man, to have to concern himself with the usual social amenities, such as saying "hello" and "goodbye" when using the telephone.

The chairman hung up the gold telephone. He let his glance sweep the table, establishing momentary eye contact with each of his senior subordinates.

"I trust that proves once and for all that God *does* love ABS," he said solemnly, "no matter what some people might say." He paused, and then went on, "O.K. Let's get to work. Somebody go find this ugly broad and sign her to an airtight lifetime contract. And make sure it includes a clause that permits us to sell her."

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## *Chapter Nine*

Ms. Shur-lee Strydent arrived in Hollywood, California, the very next evening, by private, chartered jet. She was accompanied by two senior vice-presidents and a hairdresser. The chairman had been, frankly, a little worried that Mr. Wesley St. James had been in the same condition as Mssrs. O'Mulligan, Richards, and Johnson while viewing Ms. Strydent's television debut and would attempt, once he saw her (and as importantly, heard her) sober, to back out of the gentlemen's agreement between them for her services.

There was no basis for his concern. Mr. Wesley St. James himself met the aircraft at the Burbank field. Accompanying him were his vice-presidents for public relations, publicity, and artist relations. There was also the Cucamonga Senior High School Fife and Drum Corps and two muscular chaps carrying a large floral arrangement in the shape of a horseshoe. Across the massed tulips was a purple band on which had been placed three-inch-high golden letters spelling out "Welcome to Hollywood!"

As soon as the little jet taxied close, Mr. Wesley St. James bounced out of his Rolls-Royce Corniche convertible and took up a position at the end of a red carpet already in place. Mr. St. James, titan of TV though he unquestionably was, had not been endowed generously by the deity in the build department. He stood just a hair over four feet, eleven inches tall in his elevator Gucci loafers, and weighed about the same as a small-sized jockey—somewhere in the neighborhood of 100 pounds, depending on which of his collection of large golden wristwatches he had chosen for the occasion.

He was attired entirely in recycled denim. He had a denim Dutch boy cap on his rather bony little head, a denim jacket over his tiny little shoulders, and bell-bottom denims hiding his legs and feet. Around his neck, as a pendant, he wore the token of admiration awarded him by the television industry, a solid gold-plated die-struck medallion bearing the likeness of Phineas T. Barnum, with Barnum's second most famous philosophical declaration, "This Way to the Egress"* spelled out in diamond chips along its circumference. His rather bloodshot eyes were

shielded from the glare of the sun and the flash of the photographer's lights by a set of pink-shaded sunglasses approximately four inches in diameter.

*(* Mr. Barnum's most famous philosophical observation, of course, is, "There's a sucker born every minute." However, as the high muckety-mucks of TV are well aware, there is such a thing as too much truth, and for this reason it was decided to emblazon the Barnum medallion with the immortal words with which Mr. Barnum had gotten the suckers out of his museum as quickly as possible.)*

Ms. Strydent, who had been lost in thought at this fascinating turn in her life, wondering what surprise would come next and what she could get out of it, suddenly sat upright in her seat as she saw Mr. St. James leap nimbly over the side of the Rolls onto the ground.

"What the bleep is that?" she asked, lapsing for a moment into the quaint and picturesque Staten Island patois she had learned at dear daddy's knee.

"That, Ms. Strydent," one of the vice-presidents said, "is Wesley St. James!"

"What the bleep is a Wesley St. James?" she demanded.

Before the question could be answered, the door of the aircraft opened and Mr. St. James bounded inside, looking not at all unlike a two-legged mountain goat.

"Dear Ms. Strydent!" he declaimed (more accurately, piped). "Welcome to gay and glamorous Hollywood! I am, of course, Wesley St. James! I am to daytime drama what Bill Shakespeare is to Stratford-upon-Avon."

"You're a dear little man, I'm sure," Ms. Strydent said, extending her hand to be kissed. "But if you're important, how come you're driving an old Packard?"

Wesley St. James was slightly, but only slightly, taken aback by Ms. Strydent's lack of recognition of his Rolls Corniche as the ne plus ultra of status symbols. He was, after all, quite accustomed to dealing with performers of one kind or another and fully aware that many of them are not very bright.

"Let us go, my dear Ms. Strydent," Wesley St. James said. "First to the room I have engaged for you at the Beverly Hills Hotel, and then to the

Wesley St. James Studios, where we begin to consider what contribution you can make to the world of daytime drama."

"I am, of course, delighted to be here in Hollywood," Ms. Strydent replied. "But before our relationship goes one inch further, little man, there are a couple of things we should have perfectly understood between us."

"Which are?"

"You said 'a room' at the Beverly Hills Hotel, I believe?"

"Yes, indeed," Wesley St. James replied. "With a lovely view out the window directly upon Beverly Glen."

"I am a superstar," Ms. Strydent said. "Superstars don't have rooms, little man. Superstars have *suites."* Possibly because he was not at all used to being talked back to at all, and possibly because in his judgment Shur-lee Strydent was even more of an overwhelming beauty up close than she had been over the boob tube, Wesley St. James caved in.

"Of course," he said. "Forgive me."

"And for another," Shur-lee Strydent said, "superstars of my class don't do soap opera. Specials, perhaps, if the price is right, but soap operas, never!"

"We'll talk about it," Wesley St. James said, as he led Ms. Strydent to his Rolls. "I'm sure that something can be worked out."

An hour later, they were in Mr. St. James's office at the Welsey St. James Studios. Seated on Chilian llama-upholstered armchairs, with a bottle of Moet & Chandon '66 before them on a 12-by 18-foot plate-glass coffee table, the conversation began.

"I flatter myself," Wesley St. James said, "to think of myself simply as the medium through which the great talent of people like yourself, dear Ms. Strydent, is funneled to the folks over there in TV land. My modus operandi is simplicity itself. I see to it that you have anything your little heart desires, and in turn I ask only that you bring joy and happiness, plus a tear or two, into the drab and empty life of the American housewife."

"How sweet of you! Anything my heart desires?"

"Anything at all," Wesley St. James purred.

"Sean O'Casey O'Mulligan," Ms. Strydent purred right back.

"I beg your pardon?"

"You deaf or what? I said, 'Sean O'Casey, O'Mulligan.' You said I could have anything my heart desires, and I desire Sean O'Casey O'Mulligan."

“I don’t quite understand,” Wesley St. James confessed.

“This morning, when I woke up,” Ms. Strydent said, “I realized that I had everything a girl could want. I had overnight become a superstar. ABS said I was a superstar, so I knew it must be true. I mean, if you can’t trust ABS, who can you trust, right?”

“Right!”

“And beside me, his tender body close to mine, so to speak, was Sean O’Casey O’Mulligan.”

“Oh?”

“At least until I reached over and kissed him tenderly on the forehead,” Ms. Strydent said, and a tear formed in her eye.

“What happened then?”

“Darling Sean opened one eye, sat up abruptly, and ran screaming out of the room.”

“Why did he do that?” Wesley St. James asked.

“I have no idea. I don’t care. All I know is that I want him back.”

“I’ll get right on it,” Wesley St. James said. He reached for the telephone and gave the number which connected him with the gold telephone on the chairman of the board’s desk.

“I’m afraid,” he said, ninety seconds later, “that we have a little problem.”

“Which is?”

“Mr. O’Mulligan seems to have left the country,” Wesley St. James said. “Together with Mr. Birdwell Richards.”

“Get him back,” Ms. Strydent said, reasonably.

“I’m afraid that’s impossible,” Wesley St. James said. “He has sought, and been granted, asylum in the Royal Abzugian Embassy in Paris.”

“Asylum from what?”

“That’s not quite clear at the moment,” Wesley St. James smoothly lied. “All we know is that he’s under the personal protection of his old friend, Sheikh El Noil Snoil the Magnificent, Royal Abzugian Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the World.”

While it is quite true that Mr. O’Mulligan had previously awakened in some rather strange places, after having shared his resting place with some rather strange females, never before had the sight of a vaguely remembered face staring down at him with lust and adoration quite so terrified and revolted him.

With his heart beating furiously, and fighting a near irresistible urge to end it all by jumping out of the window, he fled into the corridor and down it until he came to Mr. Birdwell Richards's suite. Entering without knocking, he rushed into Mr. Richards's sleeping chamber and roused his friend from a sound sleep.

"Fine buddy you are, you lousy Welshman!" he screamed. "How dare you do something like that to me!"

"Something like what to you, old top?" Mr. Birdwell Richards inquired. "Are you by chance referring to the lady, so to speak, with whom you got through the night?"

"You admit it, then? Sneaking that … that … *creature* into my bed in what must be the worst practical joke of all time?"

"The cold truth, old boy, is that you took her there …" Birdwell Richards said.

"Nobody, not even me, could get that drunk!"

"… After you announced that she was the woman you had been looking for all your life."

"I did no such thing!" O'Mulligan said, horror in every syllable.

"Oh, but you did," Birdwell Richards replied, leering delightedly. "You even called a press conference to make the announcement."

"The last thing I remember was some idiot swinging on the chandelier in the Oak Room," O'Mulligan said. "Crying 'Me Tarzan, you Jane!' "

"You don't remember kissing her on the telly, then?"

"On the where?"

"On the television," Birdwell Richards said.

"Oh, my God!" O'Mulligan said. "Birdwell, you've got to help me!"

"There's only one person in the world who can get you out of this, Sean," Birdwell Richards said.

"Who?"

"Boris!"

"Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov, the world's greatest opera singer? That Boris? How can he help me?"

"He can surround you with his Arabian bodyguard, that's how," Birdwell said. "That bloodthirsty platoon of six-foot-six Arabs, armed with scimitars and the very latest submachine guns. That's what it's going to take, in my professional judgment, to keep you safe from that female. She

said that you were the man she's been looking for all her life, too. And she was sober."

A shrill, piercing voice penetrated the thick walls of the Plaza Hotel.

"Sean, darling! Where is Shur-lee's precious Sean-ikins?"

"Oh, my God!" Sean cried. "It got out of its cage! It's looking for me!" His eyes darted desperately around the room. They came to rest on the dumbwaiter door. In less time than it takes to tell, he was crowded into the dumbwaiter and frantically lowering himself into the kitchen. He concealed himself there, up to his nose in a cauldron of beef consomme, until Mr. Birdwell Richards could secure the services of a Department of Sanitation garbage truck, in which Mr. O'Mulligan was carried to Kennedy International and spirited aboard the very next flight to Paris, France.

At first, Mr. Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov turned a deaf ear to Mr. Sean O'Casey O'Mulligan's plight. He had, he said, enough trouble of his own avoiding lust-crazed women. But after Mr. Birdwell Richards pointed out that professional courtesy dictated that the world's greatest opera singer offer what succor he could to the world's greatest actor in his hour of need, and after he was shown the front-page photo of Mr. O'Mulligan kissing Ms. Strydent, he gave in.

"Anyone who can get drunk enough to kiss a face like that deserves what help I can give," Boris announced. "I declare that you, from this moment, are under the diplomatic protection of myself—that is to say, of Sheikh El Noil Snoil the Magnificent!"

Sean O'Casey O'Mulligan, carried away by the emotion of the moment, kissed his hand.

"For Christ's sake, stop that!" Boris said. "The only person allowed to kiss my hand is my dog, Prince!"

Shur-lee Strydent thought Wesley St. James's announcement over for a moment, and then a smile creased her face.

"Oh, of course!" she said. "I should have known …"

"Should have known what?"

"He knew instinctively, like in that movie, that although he had discovered me, it was quite clear that soon I would be an even superer superstar than he is. Poor, darling Sean! Shur-lee's Little Seanikins took himself out of the picture, so to speak. I'll make it up to him later, teach him that I am big enough to love him even though I am the world's greatest

superstar and he's nothing but a miserable has-been. But in the meantime, what other handsome men have you on tap for me, St. John?"

"That's St. James," Wesley St. James said, rather snappishly.

"Whatever," Shur-lee Strydent said. "We superstars can't be bothered with unimportant details. Have you got a scrapbook or something?"

What followed, of course, is cinematographic (or movie) history.

Adamantly refusing to appear on television, and cleverly appealing to Wesley St. James's vanity, she induced him to produce his first Strydent Opus, a Wesley St. James Production, written, produced, and directed by Wesley St. James and released through Wesley St. James International, Unlimited.

It was originally budgeted at $7.5 million, but when the books were finally closed, it had cost almost exactly twice that figure. Ms. Strydent was cast a wealthy, socially prominent Wellesley student who improbably fell in love with an impoverished, and somewhat rough around the edges, motorcyclist she first met in a Cambridge, Massachusetts, supermarket. The motorcyclist was played by Jamison James, the six-foot-two, 210-pound blond-haired star with dimples whom demographic studies had indicated was the second most popular handsome male star in the industry, right after Sean O'Casey O'Mulligan.

The story was simplicity itself. Girl finds boy. Girl loves boy. Boy dies of an unspecified disease. Girl walks bravely off into the sunset, tears streaming down her cheeks, as a 120-piece orchestra plays "Jesus Loves Me" softly in the background.

There were certain production problems. Jamison James was very unprofessional about the whole thing. He simply refused to get on the motorcycle, which was an integral part of the story. He had given his word, he said, to his personal secretary and "companion," Dickie Darling, that he would take no greater risk with his famous profile than allowing Ms. Strydent to kiss him, once, on the forehead during the death-bed scene. He had no intention of riding around at great risk to life and limb on a stupid old motorcycle, and there wasn't enough money in the world to get him to, as he put it, "let that person embrace me." Doubles were provided, and skillful camerawork made it appear that Jamison James and Shur-lee Strydent had indeed been locked in passionate embrace, both on and off the motorcycle.

When the sneak preview of the film was held, in Akron, Ohio, a good 25 percent of the audience somehow came to the conclusion that it was a comedy and laughed out loud when they should have been sniffling into their hankies. A lesser man would possibly have been discouraged by this, but not Wesley St. James. He simply decided to match the production costs of $7.5 million with an equal amount for advertising. The money was spent entirely on television advertising, most of it shown during the breaks between Mr. St. James's parade of daytime dramas. What was advertised bore little (some said no) resemblance to what the ticket buyers would get in the movies, but this little problem was solved by the simple technique of having the film open simultaneously in the nation's 14,206 drive-in motion picture emporiums. Within a week, production and advertising costs had been earned back and there was only a faint murmur of outrage from the drive-in patrons.*

*(*Mr. St. James had known all along that the primary reason couples go to drive-ins is because they are somewhat cheaper if not, generally, quite as comfortable as the facilities offered for the same purpose by Holiday Inn and Howard Johnson's. Neither is it necessary to register, at most drive-ins, as Mr. and Mrs. John Smith. What actually appears on the screen, in other words, is of little consequence. What was important is that the couples could honestly tell their parents they had seen Superstar Shur-lee Strydent at the drive-in.)*

The film was then withdrawn from circulation for two months, after which it was brought back, for a one-night stand only, at regular (that is, indoor, sit-up) motion picture palaces. There were few complaints even then. People who have paid $3.50 a ticket are not generally willing to admit publicly that they have been swindled or hoodwinked. It was far easier to go along with the now rather widely held notion that Shur-lee Strydent was indeed the superstar of all time.

Meanwhile, production of the second Shur-lee Strydent film, a comedy in which a playful rhinocerous named Sam chases Ms. Strydent, who plays the role of a playful bank robber, through the hills and dales of Los Angeles's Mac-Arthur Park, was frantically under way.

This (largely because, some cynics said, of the advertising budget) was even more successful than the first film, and it was quickly followed by *The Mermaid Who Fell into the Sea.* In this role, Ms. Strydent played the first mate of the S.S. *Mobile Bay,* who is blown overboard in a storm and

becomes the White Goddess of a tribe of loin-clad South Pacific island dwellers, whose chief was played by another newcomer to the silver screen, a hard-rock musician who went by the name of Porky Pig, and whom studies showed was the third most popular male performer in show biz.

While she found success, of course, thrilling, Ms. Strydent found herself thinking more and more of her Darling Seanikins. As best as she was able, she had kept track of him. She had learned that he had grown a beard and was still living in the Royal Abzugian Embassy in Paris under the personal protection of Sheikh El Noil Snoil the Magnificent. She dreamed of the moment when she could fly to him and take him again into her arms. What more could a girl ask of life, she reflected, than to be not only the superstar's superstar, but to have Sean O'Casey O'Mulligan waiting for her at poolside, wearing those darling shorty-shorts, when she came home from a hard day at the studio.

She was at poolside, in fact, dreaming of just this and having her hair lovingly straightened by Larry Lovely, her personal hairdresser, when Wesley St. James came rushing in.

"Darling Shur-lee," he piped, "you'll never guess who I was just talking to and who wants to talk to you, with your permission of course."

"I give up," Shur-lee said, somewhat snappish after having been rudely brought back to reality in the midst of a delightful fantasy in which she had been fondly patting Darling Seanikins' head, while he knelt at her feet, painting her toenails.

"Who lives in a big white house on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington?" Wesley St. James asked.

Shur-lee Strydent thought it over for a minute and then shrugged. "Who cares?"

"Who would you say is the most important man in America?" Wesley asked.

"You've heard from Sean!" she said, excitedly.

"Not quite," Wesley said. "Besides, he's not an American."

"Get to the point, Wesley!"

"How would you like to go to Moscow?" Wesley asked.

"Not very much," Shur-lee replied. "Have you been at the sauce again, Wesley, darling?"

"No, I have not," he said, somewhat peevishly. "Listen, darling, how do you feel about patriotism?"

“It’s all right, I suppose, but whatever can it have to do with me?”

“What would you say if I told you that Jim-Boy himself just telephoned to me, personally … I wonder who gave him my number? … and said that it’s your patriotic duty to go and entertain the Russians in Moscow.”

“What are they offering?” Shur-lee said. “I won’t go for less than a million up front and twenty percent of the gross.”

“What Our Beloved Leader has in mind, darling, is sort of a benefit,” Wesley said.

“Then let him go to Moscow,” Shur-lee Strydent said.

“Our Beloved Leader tells me that this is important to national security,” Wesley said.

“That’s his business,” Shur-lee replied reasonably. “Mine is being a superstar.”

“Now, listen, darling. It’ll be fun, really. Lots of publicity. And all you have to do is fly to Paris and pick up your co-star …”

“Co-star? Co-star? Now, that *is* asking too much! *I* don’t have *co-stars.* I have *also stars,* and *special guest stars,* but no co-stars …”

“We can work something out about the billing, I’m sure,” Wesley St. James said.

“Did you say *Paris,* Wesley? Did I hear you say *Paris?”*

“That’s right. He’s sending his personal plane. It will make one stop in Maine, and then another in Paris, to pick up this featured player who’s going with you, and then right to Moscow.”

“You did say Paris?” Shur-lee Strydent said. “When do we leave?”

“Just as soon as the plane gets here,” Wesley said. “It’s bringing the senator out from Washington.”

“What senator?”

“Your senator, darling—Senator Kamikaze.”

“I don’t think I like that,” Shur-lee said. “What’s he horning in on my act for?”

“I’m sure our Beloved Leader will explain everything,” Wesley said. He picked up the telephone.

“Tell him I’m having my nails painted and couldn’t possibly talk to him,” Shur-lee said. “Just make sure you tell him that I expect the news of my coming to Paris to be spread all over town.”

“I don’t quite understand,” Wesley said.

“There’s a certain sweet someone in Paris, Wesley. When he hears I’m coming, he won’t dare dream that he’ll have a chance to even see me. Then, after he’s had a really good chance to eat his heart out, surprise, surprise!”

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*OceanofPDF.com*

## *Chapter Ten*

A bearded, somewhat haggard, but still handsome gentleman wrapped in a silk dressing gown, clutching a quart of Piper Heidsieck ’69 in his hand, walked across the floor of a sumptuously furnished room on Boulevard de la Grande Armée* and pulled back, just half an inch, the heavy silk brocade curtain. Instantly, he dropped it.

*(* Some scholars of sociological phenomena suggest that the Hollywood technique of overcoming weakness and gross failure by advertising was actually invented by the French. They cite as proof of their theory the number of military monuments, statues, and street names in Paris paying tribute to the French Army.)*

“God, they’re still there!” he said. He referred to a small group of perhaps twenty Frenchmen, four of them carrying placards reading “Paris Den #707, Shur-lee Strydent Fan Club,” who were marching slowly up and down, under the trees and under the eyes of both the VIP Guard Detail of the Gendarmerie Nationale and a detachment of the Royal Abzugian Marine Corps.

He was, he knew, safe from them. He didn’t think much of the Gendarmerie Nationale, but he had, since he had sought protection in the Abzugian Embassy* frequently seen proof of the courage and efficiency of the Abzugian Marines. Not one member of the several hundred Shur-lee Strydent Fan Club members who had tried to catch a glimpse, however brief, of their adored’s adored had made it across the sidewalk, much less into the front yard.

*(* The Abzugian Embassy was in the apartment of Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov. It had been so designated after the singer had learned that so declaring it would place him and his guests under diplomatic immunity.)*

But that was a two-way street. They couldn’t get in, but he couldn’t get out. At first he thought it was something that would pass with time, but he had recently been forced to consider the chilling thought that it was entirely likely he was doomed to spend the rest of his natural life in this

gilded (eighteen-room) prison, and never again be allowed to tread the streets of the world as a free man.

He couldn't even sneak out of the apartment long enough to play some cards with Boris and the guys at the Legion. Disguised in flowing Arab robes, his beard died black, hidden behind dark glasses, he had slipped out of the apartment and flagged a cab. When he pulled the door open, there were three Strydent fans inside, crawling all over themselves for a chance to touch the tender body which had once been close to the (as they phrased it) "divine corpus." He had made it back to the safety of the Gendarmerie and Abzugian Marine lines, but just barely. His robes were gone, and the elaborate headdress, and when the lines finally closed in protection around him, he had been down to the dark glasses and his jockey shorts.

He raised the bottle of Piper Heidsieck '69 to his lips, drained it, and started for the wine cellar off the Grand Dining Room for a replacement. He heard the phone ring, but didn't pay much attention to it, for there were people who did such things as answer telephones. But it kept ringing, even after he had popped the cork on the fresh bottle and taken a couple of healthy pulls. It finally dawned on him what it was. It was Boris's most private unlisted number—the telephone that even the servants were forbidden to answer, its number known to but a few highly privileged people in the whole wide world.

He paused before deciding to answer it. Most of the people who had the number (Horsey de la Chevaux, "Sexy Doc" Yancey; Prince Hassan; "Scottie" MacKenzie, and Sheikh "Up Yours, Abdullah of Abzug) were at this very moment playing cards at the Legion.

But curiosity strikes the male beast quite as surely as it touches the feminine heart. He went into Boris's bedroom and, after some effort, located the unlisted phone where it was cleverly concealed in a Louis XIV *boite de chambre.*

He picked it up.

"Sorry to wake you from your beauty sleep, Old Bull Bellow," a decidedly American, and as decidedly masculine, voice said, "but we've reconsidered."

"Oh, thank God!"

"My God, what happened to your voice?" the male caller demanded. "You sound, comparatively speaking, like a soprano."

"This isn't Boris," he said.

“Then why did you answer his private telephone?” the caller reasonably inquired. “And if you’re not Boris, who are you?”

“I was afraid for a moment that you would be Shur-lee Strydent,” he said.

“That’s a hell of a thing to say to somebody!” the caller said, horrified.

“Who is this?” he asked.

“I asked first,” the caller countered.

“I’ll tell you, if you don’t spread it around,” he said.

“Deal.”

“This is Sean O’Casey O’Mulligan,” Sean said.

“Never heard of you. Where’s Boris?”

“Not until you tell me who you are,” Sean replied.

“John Francis Xavier McIntyre, at your service.”

“Never heard of you, either,” Sean said.

“But as one Irishman to another, in that sacred bond between brothers, you will tell me, won’t you, why you answered Boris’s phone?”

“It was ringing,” Sean replied.

“I mean, what are you doing in Boris’s bedroom?”

“Answering the phone,” Sean replied.

“Where is Boris, you exception to the rule that all Irishmen are favored with superior intelligence?”

“Who did you say this was?”

“Trapper John McIntyre, you travesty on the good name of Irishmen!”

“Trapper John! El Pecker Checker? Himself?”

“Himself,” Trapper John said. “Now, where’s Boris?”

“Let me say, sir, that this is an entirely unexpected honor and privilege.”

“Thank you. Where’s Boris?”

“He’s playing poker at the American Legion,” Sean said. “Would you care to leave a message?”

“No, I want to talk to him,” Trapper John said. “There’s another phone on the bedside table. The dial part is in the shape of a heart. I don’t like to say, out loud, what the handset part is shaped like. It was a gift from the Monte Carlo Corps de Ballet.”

“I wondered what that was,” Sean said. “I thought it was some sort of an anatomical specimen.”

“It’s actually a trophy, cast from life,” Trapper John said. “Now, listen carefully. I will use little words. Pick up that obscene object and dial Boris at the American Legion. Tell him I want to talk to him. You can relay the messages.”

“Got you,” Sean said. With great reluctance, he picked up the obscene object in which the mouthpiece and earphone were concealed and dialed the number of the American Legion.

“Pecker Checker, sir,” he said after a moment. “Boris isn’t there any more. Boris is on his way here. Is there anything else I can do?”

“Is anybody there?”

“Mr. Horsey de la Chevaux is there,” Sean said. “He answered the telephone and told me that Boris isn’t there.”

“Tell Mr. de la Chevaux that I’m on the other phone.”

“Mr. Horsey, Mr. Pecker Checker is on the other phone,” Sean dutifully repeated. Then, “Pecker Checker, sir, Horsey says, ‘How y’all?’ ”

“Tell Horsey I’m just fine, thank you, and ask him if he can send a plane to pick up Hawkeye and me and some people I want Boris to meet.”

Sean repeated the message.

“Pecker Checker, sir, Mr. Horsey says to say ‘How y’all’ to Hawkeye, too.”

“Tell him Hawkeye says ‘How y’all’ back,” Trapper said. “What about the airplane?”^

“Is that the Hawkeye who is also known as the ‘Sainted Chancre Mechanic’?”

“One and the same. What about the lousy airplane?”

“Mr. Horsey says he’ll get right on it. He says it may take some time.”

“How long is some time?”

“As much as a couple of hours,” Sean said.

“Tell Horsey thank you and goodbye,” Trapper John said.

“Yes, sir, Mr. Pecker Checker, sir,” Sean said. There was a click in his ear and the conversation was over. Very gingerly, trying not to look at it any more than he had to, he started to hang up the object over which he had been conversing.

“What are you, O’Mulligan, some kind of a pervert?” Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov’s booming bass voice inquired. “I take you into my apartment, I protect you from all those weirdos, I even feel sorry enough for you to bring you a present, and how do you repay me? By laciviously fondling my thing, that’s how!”

“Oh, hi there, Boris,” Sean said. “It rang.”

“That’s a likely story,” Boris said. “With the exception of three people, everyone who has that number is playing poker at the Legion. And of the three exceptions, one is Hot Lips, who for some reason won’t use the number, and the other two are for some mysterious reason piqued with me. … I’d hate to tell you what they told me to do earlier today. Obviously they haven’t called.”

“It was the Pecker Checker who called, Boris,” Sean said. “Himself.”

“He did? Did he call to apologize for saying that to me?”

“No, he called to say he and the Sainted Chancre Mechanic have changed their minds. Horsey’s sending an airplane to pick them up.”

“Is that so? You’re not just making this all up because I found you playing with that cast-from-life objet d’art, are you?”

“Cross my heart!” Sean said. “I really hated to pick it up, to tell the truth.”

“It makes me a little uneasy myself,” Boris said. “But the girls seem to think it’s charming. More than one has tried to make off with it, and the President’s wife has been trying to get me to give it to the Louvre.”

“It is a little larger than life, isn’t it?” Sean said.

“Not at all,” Boris said, indignantly. “If anything, it’s a bit smaller than life.”

“Well, it’s of museum quality, that’s for sure.”

“Thank you,” Boris said modestly. “Well, Sean, I believe you. And you can have your present, after all.” He paused and then called over his shoulder, “Monique, Antoinette, Jacqueline, come in here so that poor Sean can see what I brought him to pass away the idle hours!”

“Brother John,” said Brother Born-Again Bob Roberts to J. F. X. McIntyre, M.D., F.A.C.S, in the living room of B. F. Pierce, M.D., ‘F.A.C.S, in the quaint and picturesque hamlet of Spruce Harbor, Maine, U.S.A., “I don’t know how to thank you.”

“My pleasure,” Trapper John replied.

“We are both looking forward,” Hawkeye said, “to listening to your little Brunhilde and our little Boris sing together.”

“And your friend, Colonel de la Chevaux, is really going to send an airplane right away?”

“That’s right,” Hawkeye said. “And soon after that, we will all be privileged to hear Boris and Brunhilde sing together. I can hardly wait to hear Boris come in on the second stanza of ‘Washed in the Blood of the Lamb.’ ”

“And I myself,” Trapper John replied, “am beside myself with impatience to see his face when he sees what we have brought him for the all-around enrichment of the world’s music.” He took Brunhilde’s color photograph from her father and looked down at it with a wide smile on his face. “I knew that the time would eventually come, Brother Bob, when I could do to Boris what yea, verily, he has so often done to me.”

“We’d better call Brunhilde right away,” Brother Born-Again Bob said, “and get her right down here.”

“Help yourself,” Hawkeye said, handing him the telephone.

Moments later, sixty-five miles away in the dormitory set aside for the gentle sex of the When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder Bible Seminary and Junior College, the telephone rang in Room 219, assigned to Ms. Bobby-Sue (a/k/a Brunhilde) Roberts. In the flesh, Brunhilde looked, it must be reported, at least as bad and, if possible, worse than the photograph of herself at which Drs. Hawkeye Pierce and Trapper John McIntyre had been looking.

Her hair was even more mouse-colored and stringy than the photograph had shown. The warts on her forehead, nose, and chin were even more ugly (the ones on her forehead and chin had long, black whiskers curling outward from them; this had not been evident on the photograph), and in person she seemed to have fewer teeth, and of a more revolting greenish hue, than those she had been proudly displaying in the photo.

And when she snatched the telephone from its cradle and spoke, her voice—raspy, piercing, and harsh—was not the sort of thing one would expect from someone with an ambition to sing, for example, the title role in *Madame Butterfly.*

“No,” she shrieked at the phone. “I told you before, I’m not going to take Weekly Sacred Harp Sing-Along with Reverend Wattersley with you!”

“Bobby-Sue, this is your daddy!” her caller said, shocked.

“Oh, I’m sorry, Daddy,” Bobby-Sue/Brunhilde said. “I thought it was somebody else.” She was so immensely relieved, since it had turned out to be her father calling, that she had run out of breath before she had been able to finish her intended opening announcement. Dear Daddy would have been disturbed to hear her call someone “an oversexed Bible beater.” Dear Daddy, who was of another generation, would simply be unable to understand what h—l on earth it was for her to be here, surrounded by 269 divinity students of various religious persuasions but who shared a common desire to violate both her and the commandment concerning the most intimate interpersonal relationship without having gone through a wedding ceremony.

She realized that part of it was her fault. She never should have gone out for the When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder cheerleading squad. Once she had done that (and once was all that she had done it, when the When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder football team, “God’s Chosen Eleven,” had played The Truth and The Whole Truth Full Gospel Seminary, once having been more than enough), her life had never been the same. Seminarians had thereafter spent most of their waking hours trying to get close to her.

“Bobby-Sue, darling,” Brother Born-Again Bob said. “I’ve got some good news for you, honey.”

“Great,” she said. “I can sure use some.” She was a little ashamed of the thought which popped into her mind. She was hoping that Dear Daddy would announce that medical science had come up with a pill, which when taken by the other sex would make them think only of roses and birds and strike s-e-x from their minds once and for all.

“You remember telling Daddy, Bobby-Sue, that your greatest desire in life was to sing the role of that Italian lady, Carmelita …”

“That’s Spanish lady, Daddy,” Bobby-Sue corrected her father, “and her name is Carmen …”

“Whatever,” Brother Born-Again Bob said, “with that Mexican fella, Boris Alexander Whatever.”

“He’s Russian, Daddy, and his name is Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov,” Bobby-Sue said. “I remember. But so what?”

“And you remember I told you that if you were a good girl and went up there to When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder, your Daddy would look into it?”

“Yeah, I remember,” she said.

“Well, it’s fixed,” Brother Born-Again Bob said. “What do you think about that?”

“What do you mean it’s fixed?” she asked.

“I mean, just as soon as you can get down here to Spruce Harbor, an airplane’s going to fly you right over to Paris, France, to meet him!”

“Daddy, dear, you haven’t let your sacramental grape juice ferment, have you?” Bobby-Sue asked. It wasn’t that she disbelieved her daddy, it was simply that as a rather serious student of the opera she was completely familiar with the reputation of the world’s greatest opera singer, both on stage and off. She had agreed to attend When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder for two reasons. One was to please her daddy, whom she truly loved, and the other was that she realized she needed several years of practice, four or six hours a day, before she could hope to earn a spot in an opera company. She had decided that When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder campus would be a place where she could practice without interruption.

She had, in other words, not paid a bit of attention to her father’s announcement that she would see what he could do about getting her an audition with Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov. He meant well, of course, but what he proposed to do was simply beyond the realm of possibility.

“Bobby-Sue, I mean, Brunhilde, has your daddy ever lied to you?”

“No,” she replied. He hadn’t. He’d told her some pretty farout things, but he had never lied to her.

“Then trust me, Brunhilde,” Brother Born-Again Bob said. “You just pack some clothes in a bag and get down here just as soon as you can.”

She paused before replying. As incredible as it sounded, there was no sense staying here. Between the men’s Bible study class climbing up the fire escape and the When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder astronomy club turning their telescopes on her day and night, she had had hardly any time to practice at all lately.

“I’m leaving right away, Daddy,” she said. “Where should I meet you?”

“At the Spruce Harbor International Airport.”

“That the one that they used to call the Napolitano Crop Dusting Service and Garage before that Boston and Maine Airways DC-3 ran out of gas and landed there?”

“That’s the one,” Brother Born-Again Bob said.

“See you there, Daddy,” she said, and hung up. She then went to the window of her room and peered out. The men’s Bible study class was still draped all over the fire escape and the trees on the lawn, and she could see the sunlight reflected in the telescopes of the Up Yonder astronomy club as they focused on her window.

She let the curtain fall back in place, and picked up the telephone. It was answered on the second ring.

“The Reverend Bosworth J. Murray, D.D., speaking.”

“Brother Bosworth,” Bobby-Sue/Brunhilde said, disguising her voice. “This is Sister Clementine, and I’m ashamed of you!”

“Ashamed of me? Are you aware that you’re speaking to the Reverend Bosworth J. Murray, D.D., president of the When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder Bible Seminary and Junior College?”

“Indeed, I am. And you should be ashamed of yourself, Brother Bosworth. Corrupting the morals of our young!”

“Explain yourself, Sister!” Brother Bosworth said.

“As if you didn’t know!”

“Didn’t know what?”

“That the men’s Bible class, drunk as lords, have climbed into the trees outside the young ladies’ dorm and are reading the risque passages from the Bible to the young ladies!”

“You don’t mean it!”

“I do, too, mean it. And the Up Yonder astronomy club, the source of their booze, just had their still blow up in the Divine Sciences Laboratory!”

“I thank you, Sister, for bringing this matter to my attention,” Brother Bosworth said. “With God’s help, and that of the When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder campus security force, I will instantly, if not sooner, banish Satan, yet once again, from our beloved campus.”

“I thought you would like to know,” Bobby-Sue/Brunhilde said. “Bye-bye.”

She hung the phone up, went into her bedroom, made certain the curtains were tightly closed and pulled her size 38-long off-purple dress over her head. Outside, she heard the first wail of sirens on the patrol cars of the When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder Campus Security and Prohibition Enforcement Service.

In her unmentionables, as she hastily threw clothing into a suitcase, it was easy to see why and how she had affected the male members of the student body when she had made her one-time appearance as a cheer leader. In a word, Bobby-Sue was stacked. For a moment, she considered wearing a dress, but realizing that she would probably have to make a dash for her car, campus security force or not, she decided on other clothing. She pulled, over a pair of hips that would have made Raquel Welch green with envy, a pair of blue jeans which appeared to be at least three sizes too small. Over her head she pulled a gray sweat shirt on which had been placed a likeness of Ludwig von Beethoven. The stitching, and indeed the very fibers of this garment, were stretched near to the breaking point by her mammary development. She slipped her feet into a pair of loafers and examined herself in the mirror.

"Oh, I almost forgot," she said aloud. She reached into her mouth and with dainty fingers extracted what are known in the trade as "caps." Beneath the slimy-green dental appliance were her own teeth—dual, long, perfect rows of gleaming choppers set in bright red gums. She dropped the caps in her purse, and then carefully removed the rubber warts from her forehead, nostrils, and chin. She added these to the choppers in her purse. Finally, she snatched the mousey-gray wig from her head, undid the thick mat of shimmering red hair which had laid beneath, and with just a stroke or two of her brush restored it to its glorious natural state.

She then closed her purse, picked up the suitcase and went to the door of her room.

"Farewell, When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder Bible Seminary and Junior College Dorm Room," she said, and then she began to sing, as she ran past the brawling students and security force to her car.

*"Pourquoi t'occuper encore d'un coeur qui n'est pas a toi? En vain tu dis: je t'adore. Tu n'obtiendras rien de moi. C'est en vain."**

She sang with such brilliance of tone, such sweetness, such command of her voice that momentarily the fighting stopped as security force and student body alike looked at her. For a brief moment, so startling was the beauty of her voice that her startling beauty was forgotten. But only for a brief moment. And then they were after her.

She beat them to her Volkswagen and locked the door. After a moment's frightening hesitation, the engine caught. She put the Bug in gear, and, by both weaving from side to side, and by jamming on the brakes

unexpectedly, was able to shake from the roof and hood all of her admirers before she shot off the campus.

She sang one more line from *Carmen* as she pointed the Bug's nose toward Spruce Harbor: "*Jamais Carmen ne cedera; libre elle est nee, et libre elle moura.*"**

*(* Act Three, Scene 26, final duo from Carmen: "Why concern yourself with a heart that is no longer yours? In vain you say, 'I love you. You'll get nothing from me. It's all in vain.")*

*(** "Carmen will never give in; free she was born and free she will die.")*

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## *Chapter Eleven*

Five minutes after Bobby-Sue/Brunhilde Roberts set out for Spruce Harbor, the telephone rang in the residence of Hawkeye Pierce. Truth to tell, both he and Trapper John were glad to hear the somewhat strident ring.

"That must be some sort of medical emergency," Hawkeye said, jumping up from the table where his wife, Born-Again Bob, and Weeping Wilma were toasting Bobby-Sue/ Brunhilde's future operatic success with a special cocktail, known as a Holy Whippersnapper,* the recipe for which had been provided by Born-Again Bob.

*(* For those with a sick interest in such things, a Holy Whippersnapper is made of equal parts of clam juice, cranberry juice, carrot juice, and the juice of one persimmon. Shake well with ice, pour in glass, and add a spritz of soda water. Hold nose before attempting to drink.)*

"Possibly even a catastrophe," Trapper John agreed, jumping to his feet and following his old pal into the den.

As Hawkeye quickly pushed the week's unironed wash away from the bookcase, and then the books in the bookcase away from the booze, Trapper John answered the telephone.

"The residence of Hawkeye Pierce," he said. "Cut-rate gallbladder jerkings, assorted fancy surgery, and advice to the lovelorn. May I help you, sir or madam, as the case may be?"

By the time he had said all this, Hawkeye had not only removed the top from the bottle, but had had sufficient time to pay close attention to the sacred medical admonition "Physician, heal thyself" by taking what he thought of as a healthy couple of belts from the bottle. At that point, Trapper John snatched the bottle from Hawkeye's hands and replaced it with the telephone receiver.

"Have I the privilege of speaking with Dr. Pierce?" the caller said, the English impeccable in every nuance and inflection.

"Yes, you do," Hawkeye said, "and I also dabble in psychiatry, which explains how the phone came to be answered in the manner in which it was. I specialize in mad Irishmen."

“How interesting,” the caller said. “Doctor, I am Senator George H. Kamikaze.”

“Of course you are!” Hawkeye said. He covered the mouthpiece and told Trapper John who the caller had said he was. They both grinned broadly.

“What did you say?” Senator Kamikaze said.

“I said, ‘Of course you are,’ ” Hawkeye said.

“Well, now that we have reached agreement on that point, perhaps it would well behoove us to reach, as rapidly as possible, while still maintaining complete comprehension on the part of both parties, the reason I’m calling.”

“Good idea,” Hawkeye said. He then handed the telephone to Trapper John with the announcement, “Senator Kamikaze wants to talk to you.”

“How are you, Senator?” Trapper John said. “How’s every little old thing?”

“Your voice keeps changing,” Senator Kamikaze said.

“My father used to say that very same thing,” Trapper John said. “What can I do for you?”

“Ask not, Doctor, what you can do for me, but rather what you can do for our Beloved Leader,” Senator Kamikaze replied.

“I can tell you what I’d like to do to our Beloved Leader,” Trapper John said, and took in a deep breath preparatory to doing just that.

“The correct active preposition, Doctor, I’m afraid, is ‘for,’ ” Senator Kamikaze said.

“In that case, Senator, the obvious reply is that there is nothing I would willingly do *for* that man. You obviously have the wrong number.”

“Unfortunately, no,” Senator Kamikaze said. “Let me be blunt, Doctor.”

“Please do,” Trapper John said.

“You have it in your power, Doctor, to cause to cease and desist two activities presently in progress affecting the security and good name of our beloved country.”

“Such as?”

“The Russians moving armored divisions around Poland and East Germany and the Soviet ambassador banging his shoe on his desk at the United Nations and saying unkind things about You-know-who.”

“Well, I’m all for stopping the Russian armored divisions from moving around, but to tell you the truth, Senator, I find myself rather in agreement with the unkind things the ambassador has been saying about You-know-who. As a matter of fact, I am seriously thinking of writing him a letter pointing out some character deficiencies in You-know-who he has so far overlooked.”

“That thought ran through my mind, too,” the senator said, “but that was before You-know-who put it to me that my patriotic duty lay in other directions.”

“Such as?”

“To get instantly to the bottom line, Doctor,” Senator Kamikaze said, “You-know-who believes that international tension can be greatly reduced if I can get two people—specifically, Shur-lee Strydent and Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov—to go to Moscow.”

“Shur-lee Strydent, the world’s ugliest movie star? That Shur-lee Strydent?”

“That is correct.”

“*And* Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov?”

“That is also correct.”

“That sounds like something You-know-who would think up,” Trapper John said.

“I would suggest that it behooves us to give You-know-who the benefit of the doubt,” the senator said.

“We already have,” Trapper John said. “He got elected, didn’t he?”

“Further sacrifice is demanded of us all, I am afraid.”

“And where do I fit into this mad scheme?” Trapper John asked.

“It has been suggested that you have some influence over Mr. Korsky-Rimsakov,” the senator said. “It has been specifically suggested that you ask Mr. Korsky-Rimsakov to go to Moscow.”

“I see,” Trapper John said. “And where do you fit into this insanity, Senator?”

“I am, at this very moment, en route in Air Force One to Spruce Harbor International Airport, Doctor, accompanied by, believe it or not, Ms. Shur-lee Strydent.”

“You’re kidding!”

“I jest not, sir. The lady is at this very moment regaling the crew with her well-worn rendition of ‘Over the Rainbow.’ ” He paused, and then

went on, “Listen.” He apparently took the telephone from his ear and held it up. Trapper John, wincing, took the telephone from his ear when the unmistakable shrill and piercing voice of Ms. Strydent came over the airwaves. “See?” the Senator said. “Or, more accurately, hear?”

“I think I’m beginning to understand, Senator,” Trapper John said.

“Then you are willing to cooperate?”

“Nothing would please me more,” Trapper John said.

“Then you are prepared to accompany me and Ms. Strydent to Paris, and there to exercise your good offices vis-à-vis Mr. Korsky-Rimsakov in suggesting that he go to Moscow, and go without making reference to his litigation regarding the ownership of the Bolshoi Theatre?”

“You have my word,” Trapper John said. “If you come here in Air Force One, accompanied by the world’s ugliest movie star, I will go to Paris, or anywhere else in the wide world you’d like me to go, and guarantee that Boris will go with me.”

“We’ll be there in an hour or so,” the senator said. “Presuming, of course, that the pilot can find it. Apparently, Spruce Harbor International Airport isn’t listed on our aerial navigation charts.”

“Look under the Napolitano Crop Dusting Service and Garage,” Trapper John said. “Nice to chat with you, Senator.”

“My pleasure, sir. I realize it’s asking a good deal of someone like you to render a service to You-know-who. But think how I feel!”

“*Sayonara*, Senator,” Trapper John said.

“*Auf Wiedersehen*, Doctor,” the senator said. The line went dead and Trapper John hung up.

“What was that all about?” Hawkeye said, passing Trapper John the bottle.

“For a while, I wasn’t sure,” Trapper John said. “Then I remembered that you said that when Boris called he said he was with Sexy Doc Yancey …”

“You refer to Theosophilis Mullins Yancey, M.D., Ph.D., D.D., and D.V.M., chief of staff of the Yancey Clinic of Manhattan, Kansas?”

“How many Sexy Doc Yanceys do you think there are?”

“I think there’s another Doctor Yancey, a completely respectable one, in Alabama,” Hawkeye said.

“One who doesn’t spend all of his time dabbling in odd variations of what is coyly known as the most personal of interpersonal relationships?”

“I understand the one in Alabama does other things as well,” Hawkeye said.

“I was, of course, referring to *our* Sexy Doc Yancey,” Trapper said. “The one with the flair for elaborate practical jokes.”

“That was a practical joke?”

“Let me put it to you this way,” Trapper John said. “What would you think if someone called out of the blue, announced he was Senator George H. Kamikaze, and that he was en route here, with Shur-lee Strydent in tow…”

“That sounds like our Sexy Doc Yancey?” Hawkeye said. “Sick imagination.”

“It gets better, or worse,” Trapper John said. “The guy who said he was Senator Kamikaze also said he was traveling on Air Force One …”

“No kidding?”

“And traveling at the special request of You-know-who.”

“The one who eats boiled peanuts and smiles a lot? *That* You-know-who?”

“That You-know-who,” Trapper said. “And that the purpose of this insane aerial odyssey was to get you … or me, I don’t think he knew who he was talking to … to talk Boris into going to Moscow.”

“I’d love to know what the punch line of the practical joke was supposed to be,” Hawkeye said. “The preparations for it are fantastic! What did you tell him?”

“I told him that, sure, if he came here on Air Force One with Shur-lee Strydent in tow, we would be happy to go to Paris with him and talk Boris into going to Moscow.”

“I suppose that we’re just supposed to sit here and wait, now,” Hawkeye said, “for Air Force One …”

The telephone rang again.

“Is that you again, Senator?” Hawkeye said, by way of greeting.

“This is Wrong-Way, Hawkeye,” Mr. Wrong-Way Napolitano, proprietor of Spruce Harbor International Airport (formerly, Napolitano Crop Dusting Service and Garage) said.

“What’s on your mind, Wrong-Way?”

“I just got an in-flight advisory from Chevaux Petroleum One-One-Seven—that’s that stretched, or Jumbo, 747, you know?”

“What about it?”

“He says he’s forty minutes out, Hawkeye. And he says he’s supposed to pick you and Trapper John and some other people up, and would I ask you to be there when he gets there. He said he was en route from South Africa to Alaska, and having to make a detour to carry you guys to Paris is going to make him run a little late.”

“Tell him we’ll be there,” Hawkeye said.

“Roger, Wilco,” Wrong-Way said, and hung up.

Hawkeye did likewise. He returned what was left (not much) of the bottle to its resting place behind the books, and then he and Trapper John rejoined Mesdames Pierce, McIntyre, and Roberts, and Brother Born-Again Bob in the dining room.

“It was Wrong-Way,” Hawkeye said. “The plane Horsey sent for us is about forty minutes out. We’ll have to hurry and pack.”

“It took that long to get that simple a message?” Mary Pierce asked, suspiciously.

“My sniffer,” Brother Born-Again Bob announced, portentously, “is twitching. It detects booze!”

“It detects *alcohol,*” Trapper John said. “Dr. Pierce and myself always wash our hands in alcohol before going abroad don’t we, Doctor?”

“Without fail!” Hawkeye agreed.

“You haven’t answered my question,” Mary Pierce said. “It took you *that* long to get a *simple* message like that?”

“Actually, no,” Hawkeye said. “There were two messages.”

“What was the other one?”

“What would you say, Mary,” Hawkeye asked, “if I told you that the other caller was Senator George H. Kamikaze?”

“Benjamin!” she said, a large threat in her tone of voice.

“And that he called to tell us that he was coming here, on Air Force One …”

“Benjamin!” This second warning recitation of his given name was sufficient to get Hawkeye to stop in midsentence.

Trapper John picked up the narrative: “With Shur-lee Strydent in tow.”

“Shur-lee Strydent?” Lucinda McIntyre asked. “The actress with the wonderfully tragic face?”

“That’s one way to put it, I suppose,” Trapper John said. “Anyway, how many Shur-lee Strydents do you think there are?”

“And that You-know-who, also known as Teeth in the White House,” Hawkeye went on, “had sent him, so that Trapper John and I could talk Boris into going to Moscow?”

“Humpf,” Mary Pierce snorted.

“Cross my heart and hope to die!” Hawkeye said, piously. “That’s exactly what happened.”

“That’s that Doctor Yancey,” Mary Pierce said. “I always said he was sick, sick, sick!”

“Until you read his book,*” Hawkeye said, “you liked him.”

*(* Dr. Pierce was here referring to either Sexual Intercourse As Exercise (848 pp., illustrated with photos, charts, and graphs, index, glossary, $10.95) or Strength and Joy Through Constant Coitus (904 pp., illustrated, $9.95) both by T. Mullins Yancey, M.D., Ph.D., D.D. and D.V.M., the Joyful Practice Publishing Company, Manhattan, Kansas.)*

Mary suddenly stood up, blushing furiously. “We’ve got to get you packed and to the airport!”

Meanwhile, at the airport, Bobby-Sue/Brunhilde Roberts was again wondering if Dear Daddy’s sacramental grape juice had undergone a change, miraculous or otherwise, into something more potent. For there, was nothing at Spruce Harbor International Airport in the way of aircraft except one battered crop duster, which hardly looked flightworthy, much less capable of carrying anyone across the wide Atlantic.

But then, far out at sea, she heard the unmistakable whine of massive jet aircraft engines. She scanned the area carefully and finally she saw it, an almost invisible dot, far, far away. But as she watched, it grew in size, and grew and grew and grew. It was the largest airplane she had ever seen and the only jet transport she had ever seen with the likeness of a shark’s jaws painted over the nose.

There was no way, she thought, that an aircraft that large could possibly land on Spruce Harbor International Airport’s main (and only) runway, a dirt strip no more than fifty yards wide.

But she erred. The speed of the stretched Jumbo 747 (a 50-foot extension had been inserted into the fuselage so that a medium-sized oil well-drilling tower could be loaded aboard without bothering to take it apart) decreased. Enormous speed brakes were extended into the slipstream. The landing carriage, all sixteen wheels, each as tall as a man, dropped into

position. The final approach was made at about sixty feet above the surface of the Atlantic. As the aircraft flashed across the rock-bound coast of Maine, the flight engineer shoved the four throttles as far forward as they would go, and the mighty engines revved to full power. Simultaneously, the co-pilot pulled on the thrust-reversers, which caused all the power which had been pulling the airplane through the air to work the other way. The pilot, at the same instant, aimed for the ground. With a piercing scream of tortured rubber, Chevaux Petroleum One-One-Seven returned to earth.

"Spruce Harbor, Chevaux One-One-Seven on the deck at one-five past the hour," the pilot said. "How they hanging, Wrong-Way?"

"Chevaux One-One-Seven, this is Spruce Harbor International Ground Control," the tower replied. "Taxi to the end of the active runway and await further orders. They're hanging all right, Charley, how's by you?"

"Chevaux One-One-Seven at the end of the active … Jesus, Wrong-Way, what is that?"

"What's what, Charley?"

"Look out your window, stupid! Raquel Welch, eat your heart out!"

"I am looking out the window, I don't see anything … oh, mama mia!"

The aircraft commander of Chevaux Petroleum One-One-Seven and the general manager, air and ground controller, and proprietor of the Airport Inn, Spruce Harbor International Airport, had both seen Bobby-Sue/Brunhilde Roberts leaning on her little Volkswagen.

Wrong-Way grabbed his microphone. "Attention all aircraft in the vicinity of Spruce Harbor International. Attention all aircraft in the vicinity! Spruce Harbor is closed to all traffic effective immediately until further notice!" He threw the mircrophone in the general direction of the radio and quickly slid down the rope ladder which gave access to the control tower. He set out at a dead run toward Miss Roberts.

Meanwhile, in the cockpit of Chevaux One-One-Seven, there was a minor personnel accident. The pilot and the co-pilot each left their seats at precisely the same moment in order to exit the aircraft. In their movement, they bumped heads, which sent both of them, both severely dazed, back into their seats, which gave the flight engineer opportunity to push the "Emergency Exit" button. The button activated a little door on the bottom of the fuselage, which opened and then caused a nylon rope ladder to unroll to the ground. The flight engineer slid down the ladder and hit the ground,

running in the direction of Miss Roberts, arriving there a second or two before Wrong-Way.

"Hi, there!" Wrong-Way said. "Welcome to Spruce Harbor International Airport! Is there any way, any little way at all, little lady, that Wrong-Way Napolitano may be of service?"

"You can stop breathing in my ear," Bobby-Sue/ Brunhilde replied. "I'm supposed to meet my father here. We're going to Paris, France!"

"By a strange coincidence, Miss," the flight engineer said, "I happen to be Captain … a reference to my former association as a Pan-American pilot … Flash Horowitz, flight engineer of the aircraft you see looming above us, which is here for the express purpose of carrying some passengers to Paris, France. Now, if you'll just accompany me aboard, we can have a little drinkie-winkie in the aircrew lounge while we wait for the others to show up."

Normally, of course, having had vast experience with invitations of this nature, Bobby-Sue/Brunhilde Roberts would have replied by kicking Captain Flash Horowitz in the shins. But as she averted her face from his, she saw, racing down the road, two familiar vehicles. The When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder Bible Seminary and Junior College Security Force had obviously gone down to humiliating defeat. Their patrol cars were now in the hands of the men's Bible class, and the men's Bible class was in hot pursuit, again, of her.

"O.K., Flash," she said. "I accept. But I must in all honesty warn you that while I have been studying Grand Opera, I have also been studying karate, Kung fu, and jujitsu. Do I make my point?" She ran to the ladder, made a little bow, and said, "After you, Flash!"

Five minutes after this, Dr. and Mrs. Pierce, Dr. and Mrs. McIntyre, and Rev. and Mrs. Roberts arrived at Spruce Harbor International in Born-Again Bob's Mobile Evangelical Vehicle, a specially adapted motor home.

Upon seeing the men's Bible class equally divided between those who were attempting to gain entrance to the airplane and those who had, so to speak, given up the chase and were sprawled on the ground under the airplane, Born-Again Bob went into action. He handed his family heirloom-sized Bible to Mary Pierce and charged into the men's Bible class, shouting his familiar battle cry, "Put that bottle down!"

Weeping Wilma, of course, began to weep. As Mary Pierce and Lucinda McIntyre attempted to console her, Hawkeye and Trapper John

ascertained from Wrong-Way that the missing member of the party, Bobby-Sue/ Brunhilde Roberts, was already aboard the aircraft. After kissing their respective mates goodbye, Hawkeye and Trapper John made their way on board the aircraft. Just as soon as they passed inside the door, the flight attendant, having received orders to pick up Drs. Pierce and McIntyre, passed the word to the cockpit that they were aboard. The mighty engines were started, and Chevaux One-One-Seven turned around, preparatory to takeoff.

Born-Again Bob, seeing what was happening, raced for the nylon rope ladder and started up it. Weeping Wilma, her eyes clouded with tears, did not see what was happening, did not race for the nylon rope ladder, and was, consequently, left behind as Chevaux One-One-Seven, throttles to the fire wall, bounced and lurched down the runway and into the air. This caused Weeping Wilma to reach new heights of tears, sobs, and howls, and it was all that Mary Pierce and Lucinda McIntyre could do to keep her from leaping off the rock-bound coast and into the Atlantic.

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*OceanofPDF.com*

## *Chapter Twelve*

"It's all right, Wilma," Mary Pierce said, peering out to sea, where Chevaux One-One-Seven had recently disappeared from sight. "They've discovered that you're not aboard and are coming back for you!"

Weeping Wilma stopped in the middle of a howl, saw that an aircraft was indeed making an approach to Spruce Harbor, and this time started to weep again, this time in joy and relief.

But the aircraft which landed was not the stretched Jumbo 747 with Chevaux Petroleum Corporation International's famous logotype painted on the tail. The aircraft which landed was much smaller, and had both a twelve-foot oil portrait of an unshelled peanut on its tail and the words THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA painted along the fuselage.

It taxied up to where those members of the When The Roll Is Called Up Yonder Bible Seminary and Junior College Bible study class still on their feet were loading those Bible students who were not into the security force patrol cars.

The door opened, aluminum steps unfolded, and a small gentleman wearing a plaid tam-o'-shanter appeared on them.

"This quaint and picturesque hamlet, I presume, is Spruce Harbor?" he inquired. He started down the stairs. Another character appeared at the door.

"Layfayette, *je suis ici!"** the lady declared. *(*Lafayette, I am here!")*

"My God," Mary Pierce said. "That's Shur-lee Strydent!"

"Get back on the plane, Miss Strydent," the chap in the tam-o'-shanter said. "This isn't Paris!"

"It isn't?" Ms. Strydent replied, looking around. "Are you sure? Or is this another of your lousy Republican dirty tricks?"

"Trust me," the chap in the tam-o'-shanter said, and then went the rest of the way down the stairs. "Perhaps, madam," he said to Mary Pierce, "the gods of fortune will finally take pity upon me and make it possible that you are acquainted with one B. F. Pierce, alias 'Hawkeye' and/ or one J. F. X. McIntyre, alias 'Trapper John'?"

“Who wants to know?” Mary snarled suspiciously.

“Senator George H. Kamikaze, at your service,” the senator said.

“You’re kidding!”

“I jest not, madam, and it behooves me to warn you that my patience, Oriental though it may be, is worn rather thin by the Democrats’ saying that!”

“Who are you calling a Democrat?” Lucinda snapped.

“What I mean to say, Senator,” Mary Pierce said, “and incidentally, I wanted to move to California just so I could vote for you, so watch who you’re calling a Democrat.”

“I don’t quite follow, madam,” the senator replied.

“Did you call my husband and tell him you were coming?”

“Only if you happen to be the legal spouse of the aforesaid B. F. Pierce.”

“Am I ever!” Mary replied. “I hate to tell you this, Senator, but my husband thought you were that awful Sexy Doc Yancey!”

“Are you, perchance, referring to the Sainted Sexual Sage of Manhattan, Kansas?”

“I am,” Mary said, “but I must tell you, Senator, that I don’t share your opinion of him.”

“Pity,” the senator said. “Whatever gave the good doctor the idea that I was Theosophilis Mullins Yancey, M.D.?” the senator inquired.

“Well, what did you expect him to think, calling up and saying you wanted him to go to Paris and Moscow with Shur-lee Strydent? What else could it be but a sick practical joke on the part of a sick mind?”

“I feel compelled to advise you, madam, that the originator of this mad idea is You-know-who with all the teeth,” the senator said.

“You’re kidding!”

“I jest not, Mrs. Pierce. And you have made the mistake twice. But I digress. You say Doctor Pierce is en route to Paris?”

“He left not ten minutes ago,” Mary replied. “With Dr. McIntyre.”

Senator Kamikaze looked up at the cockpit. In a surprisingly firm voice, he called, “Wind it up, Colonel, and head for Paris.”

He then bowed to Mesdames Pierce and McIntyre, put his tam-o’-shanter back on his head, and ran back up the stairs. Within minutes, Air Force One had lurched down the runway and sort of limped off into the sky.

Over the roar of its mighty engines there came the faint, but piercing voice of Shur-lee Strydent singing “Over the Rainbow.”

“There’s something fishy about this whole thing,” Mary Pierce said to Lucinda.

“You can say that again!” Lucinda agreed.

“There’s something fishy about this whole thing,” Mary said again. “Why do you suppose they were so willing to take Born-Again Bob and his daughter to Paris?”

“I don’t know,” Lucinda said. “My Trapper John is above that sort of thing,” she added. “But, no offense, dear, how does Hawkeye feel about young and attractive female opera singers?”

“My Benjamin wouldn’t dream of something like that,” Mary Pierce said. “I trust him absolutely, beyond question, and without doubt.” She paused long enough to take in a fresh breath. “Wilma, stop that infernal weeping and show us a picture of your daughter!”

Wilma stopped weeping long enough to announce that she believed that there was a picture of her little Bobby-Sue in the Bible Born-Again Bob had given Mary to hold. Mary flipped through the pages until she came to the 8-by- 10 color photograph of Bobby-Sue which had, indeed, inspired Hawkeye and Trapper John.

“Is this your Bobby-Sue, Wilma?” Mary asked.

Wilma paused long enough to agree that it was. Mary Pierce then grabbed Lucinda McIntyre’s arm and led her out of earshot.

“My worst suspicions are realized!” she said.

“What are you talking about?” Lucinda replied. “Not even your Benjamin could possibly be interested in that female. She’s nearly as ugly as Shur-lee Strydent!”

“That’s what I’m talking about,” Mary said. “Whatever those two plan to do in Paris has nothing to do with this tragically ugly young woman or Brother Born-Again Bob!”

“How do you know?”

“*Think,* Lucinda,” Mary said. “How long do you think Boris is going to put up with an ugly woman like this, accompanied by a father who opens every conversation by shouting ‘Put that bottle down’! Thirty minutes after those two meet Boris, they’ll be on their way home again, and our husbands will be whooping it up in Gay Paree!”

“You’re right,” Lucinda said. “Mary, they’ve outwitted us again! What are we going to do?”

“We’re going to set astray the best laid plans of those mice and men,” Mary said.

“But how?”

“I’m going to sic Dago Red on them,” Mary said. “That’ll fix their wagon!”

To accomplish this end, an international telephone call was placed to His Eminence John Joseph Mulcahy, titular archbishop of Swengchan—just as soon as Mary Pierce could get Weeping Wilma to drive her home in Born-Again Bob’s Mobile Evangelical Vehicle.

“If that number, Hazel,” Mary said to the operator, “doesn’t answer, try the Pope’s apartment. They’re very good friends.”

But the telephone in the archbishop’s Vatican apartment was answered, and on the second ring.

“Archbishop Mulcahy’s apartment, Monsignor de Villa speaking.”

“Pancho, is that you? This is Mary Pierce. I’ve got to speak to Dago Red!”

“His Eminence was just about to leave, Mary,” the monsignor, who was the archbishop’s personal secretary, said, “but I think he’ll have time for you.”

“How are you, Mary?” His Eminence said, coming on the phone. “Pancho and I were just about out the door when the phone rang.”

“I just thought you should know, Archbishop Mulcahy …” Mary said, and was interrupted.

“Have I done something wrong, Mary?” the archbishop asked.

“I don’t know,” Mary replied. “Why do you ask?”

“You called me ‘Archbishop Mulcahy,’ ” the archbishop said. “Usually you address me somewhat more informally.”

“The truth of the matter, Dago Red,” Mary said, “is that I’m coming to you in your official capacity.”

“I see,” the archbishop said. “What has Hawkeye done now?”

“He and Trapper John are en route to Paris,” Mary said, “with a young opera singer.”

“Uh oh,” the archbishop said.

“An *ugly* young opera singer,” Mary clarified. “As a matter of fact, one of the ugliest young women I have ever seen, opera singer or not.”

“I don’t quite understand,” the archbishop said.

“Neither do I,” Mary said, and started to sniffle. “In all the long years of our marriage, this is the first thing he’s ever done—evil, mad, or otherwise—that I haven’t understood.”

“Well, Mary,” the archbishop said, “I’m sure there’s nothing to worry about, but as it happens, Pancho and I were just about to leave for Paris. Boris is in some sort of trouble …”

“He is?”

“Perhaps I shouldn’t tell you this, Mary,” the archbishop said, “but I’m afraid he’s finally gone too far.”

“How do you mean?”

“Do you remember when the Russians made him a ‘Hero of Soviet Labor’?”

“Yes, of course. I don’t think I ever heard such language as I did when Boris found out the medal was only brass.”

“Well, apparently the President has found out why they gave it to him,” the archbishop said. “And he doesn’t like it one little bit. You know how You-know-who feels about you-know-what. Thinking about it is one thing; doing what Boris does about it is another.”

“I don’t quite understand,” Mary said.

“Well, he called up over here, Mary. I won’t go into all the details of the conversation, but I’ll tell you exactly what he said at the end.”

“What was that?”

“He said, ‘I’m telling you, speaking both as your President and a Southern Baptist Sunday School teacher, Archbishop, it’s your clear patriotic duty to see that that oversexed ape goes to Moscow and behaves himself this time.”

“Oh, my!” Mary said. “You’ll never guess who was just here!”

“I give up,” the archbishop said.

“Senator George H. Kamikaze and Shur-lee Strydent! They wanted to take my Benjamin and Lucinda’s Trapper John to Paris with them.”

“Shur-lee Strydent, the one who makes one weep when she sings ‘Jesus Loves Me’? That Shur-lee Strydent?”

“That’s the one,” Mary said. “Oh, Dago Red, what’s going on?”

“I don’t know, Mary,” the archbishop said, “but I’m on my way to Paris, and I’ll get to the bottom of it or my name isn’t Dago Red Mulcahy!”

“Thank you,” Mary said.

“My pleasure,” the archbishop said, and hung up. He turned to Monsignor Pancho de Malaga y de Villa. “Pancho, when they talked about hair shirts and crosses to bear in the seminary, I never thought they would be anything like this!”

FROM DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON DC
TO US EMBASSY
MOSCOW USSR

FOLLOWING PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT OF THE US TO CHAIRMAN OF THE SUPREME SOVIET TO BE DELIVERED, IMMEDIATELY:

JUST THOUGHT YOU WOULD LIKE TO KNOW THAT YOU, LIKE THE AMERICAN PEOPLE, CAN TRUST ME WHEN I SAY SOMETHING OR MAKE A PROMISE. MY PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE, THE HONORABLE SENATOR GEORGE H. KAMIKAZE, HAS JUST SENT WORD THAT HE, SHUR-LEE STRYDENT, AND FIFTY POUNDS OF MY HOME- GROWN BOILED PEANUTS ARE PRESENTLY EN ROUTE TO PARIS, FRANCE, WHERE THEY WILL BE JOINED BY BORIS ALEXANDROVICH KORSKY-RIMSAKOV AND FLY ON TO MOSCOW. WHAT FURTHER PROOF DO YOU NEED THAT I’M SOMEBODY WHO CAN BE TRUSTED? YOU-ALL COME TO SEE US.

END PERSONAL MESSAGE.

A half hour before Mary Pierce telephoned the archbishop in his Vatican apartment, Monsignor de Malaga y de Villa had been faced with a moral dilemma. The Archbishop was a man of simple taste who disliked public displays of respect to him personally and who was actually uncomfortable when confronted with the (he felt) rather ostentatious prerogatives of someone holding his high rank in the church hierarchy de jure and de facto (the rumors of his close personal friendship with the Pope were quite true).

Archbishop Mulcahy had “suggested” (which was his way of giving orders) that the cardinal archbishop of Paris “not be bothered” with the news that he was coming to town. If the cardinal archbishop knew Archbishop Mulcahy was coming to town, the train would be met by an official delegation of high-ranking prelates and an official limousine.

What the archbishop wanted to do was simply arrive anonymously and with no fanfare whatever and proceed, probably by the Metro, which is what they call the subway in Paris, to Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov's apartment. In the archbishop's mind, a position the Monsignor both understood and felt great sympathy for, he was not functioning as a high-ranking prelate of the church, but simply as a priest, paying an unannounced pastoral call on one of his flock who he knew was in difficulty.

The archbishop had often confessed that he would have been much happier had he never been called to high rank, that the happiest period of his priesthood had been the time he had been Chaplain (Captain) Mulcahy, U.S. Army, assigned to the 4077th M*A*S*H in Korea. There he had been able to function as a priest, bringing moral and spiritual guidance to a group of people he had truly loved, even though only a small percentage of them happened to be of the Roman Catholic persuasion.

The monsignor understood all this, and he knew how much pleasure it gave the archbishop to be able to rush to the assistance of one of "the old 4077th M*A*S*H gang," as the archbishop thought of it.

The problem was that bitter experience had taught the monsignor that too often when the archbishop dropped in unexpectedly on "the old 4077th M*A*S*H gang" certain members of that "gang" (in particular, Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov) were engaged in certain activities with members of the opposite sex, which the archbishop would really rather not know about. In deference to the archbishop, of course, Mr. Korsky-Rimsakov and the others would cease and desist such activities if they knew His Eminence was going to appear.

"Anything Dago Red wants," as Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov so often said, "Dago Red gets."

Monsignor de Malaga y de Villa also knew, again from painful experience, that when the singer was gathered together with Colonel Horsey de la Chevaux, Dr. Theosophilis Mullins Yancey, and His Royal Highness Sheikh Abdullah of Abzug, it followed as the day follows the night that the premises would be literally inundated with members of the opposite sex whose morals would make them unlikely candidates for Holy Orders.

All it would take, the monsignor knew, to have the girls sent back whence they came was a telephone call announcing the archbishop's arrival. One little telephone call, and that motley crew of sinners, as the monsignor

thought of them, would be sitting around Boris's apartment, wholly sober, fully clothed, and engaged in innocent little games, the stakes for which were wooden matches.

Unfortunately, if Colonel de la Chevaux were informed that the archbishop was coming, he regarded it as his special privilege to ease the archbishop's burdens. This translated to a fleet of limousines at the railroad station, an eight-room suite at the Ritz, and the like. So it was with His Royal Highness Sheikh Abdullah. As a token of his respect for the man he had dubbed El Doog Nehtaeh, he would dispatch to meet the archbishop the same fleet of limousines, plus his bodyguard, and a brass band to accompany the procession to the Ritz, the whole of which hostelry he would engage for the length of the archbishop's stay.

His only hope was to speak with Prince Hassan. Prince Hassan, despite his own low morals, could be counted upon to understand the archbishop's position. And so, although he knew he was going against the archbishop's wishes, Monsignor de Malaga y de Villa had telephoned the Royal Hussidic Embassy, which was located in the Hotel Continental, just across from the Tuileries Gardens.

And so it came to pass that when the archbishop, dressed as a simple priest and carrying his own rather battered overnight case, descended from the second-class railroad car which had carried him from Rome, he almost immediately recognized a familiar face.

It was a round little face, with a moustache and a small pointy beard and dark sunglasses, surmounting a round little body (five feet by four feet) wrapped in gold brocade robes. Behind it, in silver brocade robes, stood five six-foot-three gentlemen in dark glasses, each robe bulging suspiciously as if it concealed, for example, a submachine gun.

"Why, Prince Hassan!" the archbishop said. "What a pleasant coincidence!"

"Isn't it?" the prince said. "How nice to see you, Your Eminence!"

"Whatever are you doing here in the Gare de l'est?" the archbishop said, shaking the Prince's hand. "You remember Monsignor de Malaga y de Villa, of course?"

"How nice to see you, Monsignor," the prince said. "Isn't this an interesting coincidence?"

"You were saying what you were doing here?" the archbishop said.

“Oh, we just stopped in for a moment to watch the locomotives,” Prince Hassan said. “Can we drop you anywhere?”

“We wouldn’t want to put you out,” the archbishop said. “We’ll just take the Metro and be on our way.”

“By another strange coincidence,” the prince said, “now that we’ve seen the locomotives, we’re on our way to Orly. By a strange coincidence, Drs. Pierce and McIntyre are about to land. Isn’t that a strange coincidence?”

“Yes, it is,” the archbishop said, looking strangely at the monsignor.

‘And there’s a radiotelephone in the car,” the prince said, “so we can call the maestro and let him know that we coincidentally bumped into each other.”

“That would be nice,” the archbishop said. “As a matter of fact, that’s why I came to Paris, to see Boris.”

“Isn’t that an interesting coincidence?” the prince said.

FROM THE COMRADE COMMISSAR OF FOREIGN RELATIONS

THE KREMLIN, MOSCOW, USSR

TO THE COMRADE AMBASSADOR

EMBASSY OF THE USSR

PARIS, FRANCE

THE COMRADE CHAIRMAN OF THE SUPREME SOVIET IS IN RECEIPT OF A TELETYPE MESSAGE ALLEGEDLY SENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE IMPERIALIST CAPITALIST U S OF A IN WHICH IT IS ALLEGED THAT AN INDIVIDUAL PURPORTING TO BE SENATOR GEORGE H. KAMIKAZE IS EN ROUTE TO PARIS, FRANCE, WITH FIFTY POUNDS OF BOILED PEANUTS AND AN INDIVIDUAL IDENTIFIED AS SHUR-LEE STRYDENT, SEX, OCCUPATION, AND PURPOSE UNSPECIFIED. IT IS FURTHER ALLEGED THAT THE INDIVIDUAL PURPORTING TO BE A US SENATOR WILL MEET WITH BORIS ALEXANDROVICH KORSKY-RIMSAKOV AND THEN BRING HIM TO MOSCOW.

THE CHAIRMAN OF THE SUPREME SOVIET ORDERS THAT THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR TO FRANCE TAKE WHATEVER STEPS ARE NECESSARY TO INSURE THAT BORIS ALEXANDROVICH KORSKY-RIMSAKOV AND THE PERSONS

IN HIS PARTY BE ISSUED WITH A VALID VISA PERMITTING THEM TO ENTER THE UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS.

THIS MATTER IS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE TO BOTH THE COMRADE CHAIRMAN OF THE SUPREME SOVIET AND TO THE UNDERSIGNED FOR REASONS THAT ARE NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS. YOU ARE REMINDED HEREWITH THAT PARIS IN THE SPRING IS A FAR, FAR NICER PLACE TO BE ABOUT THE PEASANTS' AND WORKERS' BUSINESS THAN, FOR EXAMPLE, ITABURSK, SIBERIA, IN THE MIDDLE OF THE WINTER.

THE CHAIRMAN AND I HAVE FULL FAITH IN YOU, BUT THE CHAIRMAN SUGGESTS THAT AS YOU ARE TENDING TO THIS IMPORTANT WORKERS' AND PEASANTS' BUSINESS YOU KEEP IN MIND THE SAGE OLD RUSSIAN PROVERB, QUOTE NEVER TRUST A MAN WHO TELLS YOU HE CAN BE TRUSTED UNQUOTE.

IN THE NAME OF THE SOVIET WORKERS AND PEASANTS

THE COMRADE CHAIRMAN OF FOREIGN RELATIONS

P.S. NEITHER THE COMRADE CHAIRMAN'S PATE DE FOIS GRAS NOR THE UNDERSIGNED'S TWICE A WEEK SHIPMENT OF FROZEN PHEASANT UNDER GLASS WERE IN THE LAST DIPLOMATIC POUCH AS THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO BE. IF YOU ARE STILL AMBASSADOR WHEN THIS IS OVER, YOU ARE DIRECTED TO LOOK INTO THIS IMMEDIATELY.

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## *Chapter Thirteen*

As soon as Chevaux One-One-Seven touched down at Paris's Orly airfield and had taxied to its parking spot, a small convoy of vehicles drove out to meet it. (In compliance with Monsignor de Malaga y de Villa's request for absolute simplicity, Prince Hassan had ordered that his bodyguard travel in the smallest vehicles in the embassy motorpool. The bodyguard was jammed into small Fiats, and His Highness himself, the archbishop, and Monsignor de Villa were in a Cadillac Seville.) *

*(* The makers of the Cadillac Seville placed second, with their philosophy "Less Is More," in the competition which saw Mr. Wesley St. James carry off the "Phineas T. Barnum Award," although it is reliably reported that they intended to refuse the award, in the interests of modesty, had they won.)*

As soon as the crew door popped open and the nylon rope ladder came tumbling down, the archbishop, with Monsignor de Villa and His Highness right behind him, went climbing up it.

He marched purposefully down the long (and empty) main fuselage, and then climbed up a ladder leading to the second-floor passenger lounge. He frowned and blushed a little at the sound of a bawdy song which came from the passenger lounge and filled the cargo compartment.

His quite natural expectation was to find Hawkeye and Trapper John in a very good mood indeed, to judge from the song, but this is not what happened. Trapper John and Hawkeye were sitting together, undrunk beer before them, looking quite disconsolate.

They were glad to see him, of course, jumping to their feet when they saw him enter the lounge, running to him, kissing him wetly on the forehead, and inquiring into his all-around health.

"What are you two guys up to?" the archbishop inquired after he had been set back on his feet.

"Dago Red, have you ever had one of those days when everything seemed to go wrong?" Hawkeye said.

"Yes, of course," the archbishop replied. "But before we go any further, can you ask your friend to stop singing that very risque song?"

“He won’t listen to us,” Hawkeye said. “Maybe you can reason with him. He’s in the same line of work.”

“Who is he?”

“The Reverend Born-Again Bob Roberts,” Trapper John said.

“A clergyman?”

“So to speak,” Hawkeye said. “The minute we got in the air, he got airsick, and Trapper John gave him a little snort to settle his stomach. He’s been that way ever since. I didn’t know until now just how many verses there are to ‘Roll Me Over, Yankee Soldier’!”

“I was led to believe that you were accompanied by a young woman,” the archbishop said.

“When he started to sing, we sent her up front, to ride with the crew,” Hawkeye said. “That’s something else that went wrong.”

“What do you mean?”

“She’s a raving beauty,” Hawkeye said.

“Like Hot Lips as a young woman, times two,” Trapper John said.

“And in her photograph, Dago Red, she was simply magnificent,” Hawkeye said.

“The ugliest woman I had ever seen,” Trapper John said admiringly. “And I have seen some ugly women in my day.”

“But, stripped of all her clever feminine tricks of makeup and disguise, she’s simply gorgeous,” Hawkeye said.

“She can probably sing, too,” Trapper added. “The way things have been going for us, she can probably sing like an angel.”

“I don’t quite understand,” the archbishop said. “But before we go any further with this, I’ve had all I can handle of that bawdy singing. Will you excuse me a moment?”

How exactly he accomplished what he did will probably never be known, but thirty seconds after he walked to the rear seat, where Reverend Born-Again Bob Roberts was singing between pulls at his half-gallon bottle of Old Stagg, the singing stopped and the bottle had changed hands.

“Now,” the archbishop said, returning to them, “what was all this about?”

“It was one of our better ideas,” Hawkeye said.

“We were finally going to get back at Boris,” Trapper John said.

“Our time had come,” Hawkeye added.

“Revenge is sweet,” Trapper John said fervently.

“Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord,” the archbishop replied.

“In this case, Dago Red, I’m sure He would have understood,” Hawkeye said. “We were going to drop in on Boris unannounced with a Total Temperance preacher who usually opens conversations by shouting ‘Put that bottle down,’ and accompanied by the ugliest woman in the world, who wanted to study opera at his side.”

“I am ashamed of myself to realize that, for a moment there, I was tempted to agree that was a splendid idea,” the archbishop said. “But it would have been a cruel thing to do to the ugly woman.”

“The whole thing is moot,” Hawkeye said. “Born-Again Bob is as drunk as an owl, and our magnificently ugly woman ain’t.”

“What?”

“See for yourself,” Trapper John said. “Bobby-Sue, say hello to Dago Red.”

“Well,” the archbishop said. “It’s a pleasure to see someone so young and lovely.”

“She can probably sing, too,” Hawkeye said. “Everything has gone wrong.”

“My name is Mulcahy, dear. I’m a priest.”

“He’s an archbishop is what he is,” Hawkeye said.

“Oh, Your Eminence,” Bobby-Sue/Brunhilde Roberts said, “I’m so embarrassed about Dear Daddy. He’s never done anything like this before.”

“Put it from your mind, child,” the archbishop said. “Sometime, when we have more time, I’ll tell you how it came to pass that I am known to certain close friends as Dago Red. Suffice it to say for the moment that your father is not the first man of the cloth that these two maniacs have gotten drunk. But first things first.”

“I beg your pardon?” Bobby-Sue/Brunhilde asked.

“There is no way I am going to permit this sweet and innocent child to get anywhere near Boris!” the archbishop said, with all the considerable firmness of which, on occasion, he was capable.

“But, Your Eminence, I came to Paris to sing for the maestro.”

“It isn’t the singing I’m worried about,” the archbishop said. “I will arrange for that in good time, I give you my word. Presuming, of course, that we are able to straighten things out between him and the President.”

“What do you mean by that?” Hawkeye asked.

“He called me and told me it was my clear patriotic duty to get Boris to Moscow,” the archbishop said. “Now I realize that Boris is misunderstood at times, and that he is, to be frank about it, capable of behavior which will send a Southern Baptist Sunday School teacher climbing up the walls. But I think throwing him out of the country is going a bit far.”

“I have just had an unpleasant thought,” Hawkeye said. “That probably *was* really Senator Kamikaze on the phone.”

“I understand he called,” Archbishop Mulcahy said.

“And I gave him, in the belief that he was a phony, my personal guarantee that if he showed up with Shur-lee Strydent, I would get Boris to wherever he wanted Boris to go.”

“Big mouth!” the archbishop said.

The pilot came into the lounge.

“I thought it was you, Dago Red,” he said, embracing the prelate warmly. “I haven’t seen you since you took your instrument check.”

“Nice to see you, too, Charley,” the archbishop said.

“The reason I came back,” the pilot said, “is that I just heard over the radio that Air Force One is about to land, and they wanted to know where you two are.”

“That’s all we need,” Hawkeye said. He looked out the window and saw Air Force One making its approach.

“We’ve got to get out of here,” Trapper said.

“The question is where do we hide this lovely child,” the archbishop said. “Someplace where Boris would never think to look for her.”

“Your Eminence,” Prince Hassan said, “I know just the place.”

“Where?”

“Boris’s dressing room at the Opera,” Hassan said. “There is no place in the world he hates more. He goes there only before a performance, and there’s nothing scheduled for three weeks.”

“That’s not a bad idea,” Hawkeye said.

“Oh, you darling little man,” Bobby-Sue/Brunhilde said, bending over and kissing Prince Hassan wetly in the middle of his forehead. “Can you ever forgive me?”

“Forgive you for what?” His Royal Highness said, blushing furiously.

“For not instantly recognizing the man who not only is privileged to be the maestro’s most faithful friend, but who has spared the maestro so many of the pains of life!”

“You may consider yourself forgiven,” the prince said. “I will personally take this lovely child and fellow opera lover to Boris’s dressing room.”

“I think I should warn you, Hassan,” Hawkeye said, “that Bobby-Sue/Brunhilde holds a Black Belt in karate.”

“Dr. Pierce,” Bobby-Sue/Brunhilde said, rather sharply, “you are not suggesting, I hope, that it would even enter His Highness’s mind that he is of the opposite gender? Shame on you! We’re opera lovers and above that sort of thing, aren’t we, Your Highness?”

“Absolutely,” His Royal Highness replied.

“Trapper John will go with you,” the archbishop said. “He’s an opera lover himself.”

“Make sure she doesn’t get too good a look at Boris’s etchings,” Hawkeye said.

“Hawkeye and I will go to Boris’s apartment and see if we can’t get to the bottom of this,” the archbishop said.

“I think we’d better take him with us,” Hawkeye said, nodding toward Brother Born-Again Bob, who was, a smile of utter contentment on his face, snoring loudly in his seat.

“I hate to disturb him,” Dago Red said. “He looks so … peaceful.”

“If we’re going to set things right between Boris and El Teetho,” Hawkeye said, “we’re going to have to have somebody whisper the right things in his ear. No disrespect, Dago Red, but I think Our Noble Leader will be more likely to be sympathetic to a total-abstinence clergyperson named Born-Again Bob than he is to an archbishop from Rome named Dago Red.”

“You may have a point,” the archbishop said. He walked to the seat where Brother Born-Again Bob was resting and, with surprising agility for someone of his slight build and years, quickly knelt and arranged Brother Born-Again Bob over his shoulders in the fireman’s carry. “Let’s get this show on the road!” he ordered.

As this was taking place, a long-wheelbase Rolls-Royce, bearing both the CD (for Corps Diplomatique) insignia of the Diplomatic Corps and a large silk and gold-thread hammer and sickle flag on the right front

fender, rolled majestically around the Arc de Triomphe de 1Étoile and turned down the Avenue de la Grande Armée.

It carried both the official ambassador of the Russian peasants and workers to the oppressed workers of France and his immediate superior, who was cleverly disguised as the chauffeur.

"To tell you the truth, comrade, off the record, of course," the ambassador said to the chauffeur, "I'm just a trifle worried."

"Why is that, comrade?"

"The last time I paid an official visit to Maestro Korsky-Rimsakov,-vis-à-vis his returning to Moscow to perform at the Bolshoi, he was rather rude."

"Oh?"

"Specifically, he said that if he ever saw my ugly face again he'd make me eat my top hat."

"You have your orders, comrade," the chauffeur said. "We must all be prepared to make sacrifices for the cause."

"My thinking exactly, comrade," the ambassador said. "How about you going to give him the visa?"

"Not on your life," the chauffeur said. "My orders are to remain under cover until the revolution starts and the French workers and peasants take to the barricades."

"Then you'd better get ready to come out from under the covers," the ambassador said. "Look up the street!"

"I see it—so what?" the chauffeur said.

"If that isn't a revolution in progress, with workers and peasants at the barricades rising up in righteous rebellion against the oppressive forces of capitalistic imperialism, I don't know what it is."

"Talk about stupid!" the chauffeur said. "Talk about jumping to the wrong conclusion! No wonder you're only the ambassador!"

"I don't quite understand, Comrade Chauffeur," the ambassador protested.

"That riot in the streets up ahead is nothing more than Den #707 of the Shur-lee Strydent Fan Club," the chauffeur said. "You can tell by the flags, the ones they're beating the gendarmes with. It says what they are right on the flags."

"But they *are* rioting," the ambassador said.

“What they’re doing, comrade,” Comrade Chauffeur said patiently (if a trifle condescendingly), “is simply practicing.”

“Practicing for what?”

“The arrival of their idol,” the chauffeur replied. “The Strydent person has just landed at Orly. I heard it on the radio.”

“And she’s coming here? Perhaps we can kill two birds with one stone, as they say.”

“You’re supposed to give her a visa, Comrade Ambassador. Nobody said anything about killing anyone. And that would be in my department anyway, not yours.”

“A figure of speech, Comrade Chauffeur,” the ambassador said. “Nothing more. I wouldn’t dream of usurping your privileges.”

“Don’t let it happen again, comrade,” the chauffeur said.

A gendarme stepped in front of the limousine, blowing his whistle, and waving his white baton.

“Stop!” he said. “In the name of La Belle France!”

The chauffeur lowered the window.

“This is the official Rolls-Royce limousine of the workers’ and peasants’ ambassador to the oppressed workers of French capitalism,” he announced. “What do you mean, ‘Stop’?”

“I wouldn’t want that you should get the paint scratched,” the gendarme replied. “Which is what’s going to happen if you persist in driving past the maestro’s apartment.”

“We are on our way to see Comrade Korsky-Rimsakov,” the chauffeur said. “On official workers’ and peasants’ business.”

“You’re kidding!”

“I wouldn’t kid about something like that,” the chauffeur said. “Now get out of the way!”

“I’ll do better than that,” the gendarme said. He gracefully swung his hips, which caused the famous gendarmes’ cape to move away from his ample hips. He reached down and took from his belt a device known in France as a “systeme radiotelephonique pour les communications”* *(*It would be known In America as a walkie-talkie.)* and spoke to it: “Antoine, Antoine, here is Gaston, Gaston.”

“Alio, Gaston, here is Antoine,” the walkie-talkie replied.

“Antoine, I have here the Russian ambassador. He wishes to see the maestro.”

“You’re kidding!”

“Antoine, I kid not. Would you be good enough to relay the information to the maestro?”

“With the greatest of pleasure, Gaston,” Antoine said. “Stand by.”

Gaston turned to the chauffeur and announced. “Lieutenant Antoine de la Foret is liaison officer between the Gendarmerie Nationale and the maestro,” he said. “He is at this moment in the maestro’s apartment, relaying to the maestro the information that you and the ambassador wish to see the maestro.”

“That’s better,” the chauffeur snapped. “You’re not dealing with any of your own oppressed workers, you know.”

“Gaston, Gaston, here is Antoine, Antoine!” the walkie-talkie said.

“Here is Gaston, Antoine.”

“The maestro says that if you’re really sure it is the Russian ambassador, you are to ask him if he has come to talk about the maestro performing at the Bolshoi.”

“Tell him we are, we are!” the ambassador said. He and the chauffeur looked at each other and beamed as Gaston relayed this information to Antoine.

“Gaston, the maestro says he would consider it a great personal favor if you would escort the ambassador and anyone with him through the riot and into the front yard,” the walkie-talkie said.

“Tell the maestro that his every wish is my command,” Gaston replied. He blew his little whistle again, three short blasts, and a squad of gendarmes in hard hats, face masks, and other battle gear came trotting up. “If you will be so good as to follow me, Monsieur L’Ambassadeur,” he said, opening the rear door with a little bow.

“Wait for me!” the chauffeur shouted, getting quickly out from behind the wheel. A flying wedge was formed, with the ambassador and the chauffeur in the middle, and, at the trot, the group made its way through the lines of Shur-lee Strydent fans being held at bay by other gendarmes and members of the Sheikh Abdullah ben Abzug’s Royal Bodyguard.

The ambassador’s silk top hat was knocked from his head by one especially zealous member of Den #707 of the Shur-lee Strydent Fan Club, and he stepped on it, but with that exception no further damage was caused, and in a matter of moments they were inside the fence outside the maestro’s apartment building.

“Antoine,” the Gendarme said, “here is Gaston. We are in the front yard. Please inform the maestro.”

“Gaston,” the walkie-talkie replied. “The maestro asks if you are absolutely sure that the man in the Ted Lewis top hat is really the ambassador, and if the ugly man with him is also a member of the Soviet delegation wishing to call upon him.”

“Antoine, please tell the maestro he has my personal assurance,” Gaston replied.

“In that case, Gaston, the maestro asks that you and the other gendarmes step away from the Soviet delegation so that the maestro can come on the balcony and see for himself.”

The gendarmes quickly moved fifteen to twenty feet away from the ambassador and his chauffeur. The ambassador and the chauffeur raised their faces expectantly upward toward the balcony.

“Comrade Chauffeur,” the ambassador said. “That doesn’t look like Comrade Korsky-Rimsakov!”

“That’s because it isn’t Comrade Korsky-Rimsakov, stupid,” the chauffeur replied. “That’s his good friend, the well-known Arab oppressor of the people, Sheikh Abdullah ben Abzug.”

“There he is!” the ambassador said excitedly. “I recognize him now!”

Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov appeared on the platform and peered downward, grinning broadly. Behind him appeared Colonel Jean-Pierre de la Chevaux, Dr. T. Mullins Yancey, and the familiar face of Sean O’Casey O’Mulligan.

“Hi, there, Comrade Korsky-Rimsakov!” the ambassador called cheerfully.

“Greetings from the Soviet Secret Police!” the chauffeur, caught up in the excitement of the moment, called.

“One, Two, Three, *heave!”* Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov called.

FROM THE COMRADE AMBASSADOR TO FRANCE
EMBASSY OF THE USSR
PARIS, FRANCE
TO THE COMRADE COMMISSAR OF FOREIGN RELATIONS
THE KREMLIN, MOSCOW, USSR

INFORMATION COPIES TO

THE COMRADE COMMISSAR OF THE SECRET POLICE THE COMRADE SUPREME CHAIRMAN OF THE SUPREME SOVIET

IN COMPLIANCE WITH YOUR TELETYPE MESSAGE REGARDING GRANTING A VISA TO VISIT OUR BELOVED MOTHERLAND TO THE SINGER B. A. KORSKY-RIMSAKOV, THE UNDERSIGNED ACCOMPANIED BY HIS CHAUFFEUR WENT TO THE RESIDENCE OF COMRADE B. A. KORSKY-RIMSAKOV.

WHILE STANDING IN THE FRONT YARD OF SAID RESIDENCE, AND IN FULL VIEW OF DEN #707, SHUR-LEE STRYDENT FAN CLUB, CITIZEN KORSKY-RIMSAKOV, AIDED AND ABETTED BY THREE OF HIS IMPERIALIST, CAPITALIST GANGSTER ASSOCIATES, THREW TWO BUCKETS OF DIRTY DISHWATER, ONE BUCKET OF GARBAGE, AND ONE BAG OF VACUUM CLEANER DIRT DOWN UPON THE UNDERSIGNED AND HIS CHAUFFEUR.

CITIZEN KORSKY-RIMSAKOV ALSO SHOUTED CERTAIN SCURRILOUS ALLEGATIONS VIS-A-VIS THE LEGITIMACY OF THE COMRADE SUPREME CHAIRMAN OF THE SUPREME SOVIET AND THE UNDERSIGNED, THE EXACT WORDING OF WHICH THE UNDERSIGNED IS RELUCTANT TO REPORT VERBATIM.

IN VIEW OF THE FOREGOING, THE UNDERSIGNED FEELS THAT CITIZEN KORSKY-RIMSAKOV MAY NOT BE WILLING TO COME TO MOSCOW AT THIS TIME.

PLEASE ADVISE.

KIRIL M. LOBOBSKY, JR.,
THE COMRADE AMBASSADOR OF THE WORKERS AND PEASANTS TO FRANCE

FROM THE SUPREME CHAIRMAN OF THE SUPREME - SOVIET

THE KREMLIN, MOSCOW, USSR

TO THE COMRADE, AMBASSADOR OF THE WORKERS AND PEASANTS

EMBASSY OF THE USSR

PARIS, FRANCE

IN REPLY TO YOUR MOST RECENT TELETYPE VIS-A-VIS GRANTING A VISA TO B. A. KORSKY-RLMSAKOV:

AS THE RESULT OF A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE SUPREME SOVIET, IT WAS DECIDED TO OFFER YOU AND THE OFFICIAL AMBASSADORIAL CHAUFFEUR TWO OPTIONAL COURSES OF ACTION:

(a) PROCEED DIRECTLY TO MOSCOW VIA FIRST AIR TRANSPORT. IT IS SUGGESTED THAT YOU MIGHT FIND IT USEFUL TO ACQUIRE AS MUCH WARM CLOTHING AS POSSIBLE, SO THAT YOU AND THE AMBASSADORIAL CHAUFFEUR WILL BE COMFORTABLE SHOVELING ICE AND SNOW IN ITABURSK, SIBERIA, FOR THE NEXT TEN YEARS, OR

(b) REPLY WITHIN TWELVE HOURS THAT COMRADE KORSKY-RIMSAKOV IS ON HIS WAY TO OUR BELOVED HOMELAND.

FOR THE WORKERS AND PEASANTS THE SUPREME CHAIRMAN, HIMSELF

*OceanofPDF.com*

## *Chapter Fourteen*

The ambassador of the United States of America to the French Republic climbed out, with some difficulty, from the rear seat of the official ambassadorial limousine, a Chevrolet Chevette with the glass door and deluxe vinyl hubcaps options, and marched, with as much dignity as he could muster under the circumstances, toward the stairs leading upward to the great silver bird with the twelve-foot unshelled peanut on its tail.

He was dressed, according to the new ambiance, not in the black morning coat and gray-striped trousers one normally expects ambassadors to wear when about the President's business, but instead somewhat more casually. He was wearing a pair of well-faded blue jeans, a pair of French, Shriner & Urner "Georgia" model clodhoppers, rough side out, and a gray sweat shirt emblazoned with an admonition to "Keep Georgia Green! Eat More Peanuts!"

This sort of dress wasn't exactly what he had had in mind when he'd come to an understanding with one of the President's closest advisers, one Fernwood T. Pluckett, who had taken a leave of absence from his successful used cotton gin business to help with the campaign.

Pluckett had told him the Paris embassy was "up for grabs," and as one businessman to another they had both understood that the successful grabee was more than likely going to be the one who made the most generous contribution to the campaign.

The man who was now the ambassador had, purely in the interest of seeing the country saved from the Republicans, made a generous contribution to the campaign coffers, and, sure enough, shortly after Inauguration Day, he had been asked whether he would like to go to Paris.

He replied in the affirmative, frankly regarding the appointment as a fitting reward for a man who had turned one rather grubby drugstore into a glistening chain of same, by dint of hard work, nose to the grindstone, and having married the somewhat ugly daughter of a shopping mall czar. His wife, who liked to think of herself as Madame Ambassador-Designate, had had an all-too-brief moment of triumph in Chicopee Falls, Wyoming, amongst her peers and then they had come to Paris, not as they had

anticipated, by a special flight of one of those great silver birds with THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA painted along the fuselage, but as standby (and it turned out, stand-up) passengers aboard a special economy charter flight of Whiz-Bang Airways, their fellow passengers being a delegation of Portland, Oregon, plumbers en route to an international convention in Belgrade, Yugoslavia.

He had been right on the edge of submitting his resignation, but had not done so only because he had begun to suspect this is what the man he had come to think of as The Teeth in the White House had wanted all along. The moment he resigned, The Teeth in the White House could appoint another of his Georgia cronies to the position.

What he had been ordered to do now, however, was, as he confided to Madame Ambassador over breakfast in the Rue de Castiglione McDonald's (the embassy kitchen had been closed as an economy measure; employees were given McDonald's Happy Clown Meal Tickets in lieu of embassy rations), likely to be the straw that broke the camel's back.

He had been ordered, by teletype, to not only meet Air Force One (which was obviously Teeth in the White House's means of rubbing salt in the wound), but to do so bearing a bouquet of red roses for a person the ambassador loathed and despised.

But until he actually got to the top of the stairs and saw Miss Shur-lee Strydent (actually until she put out her bony fingers for him to kiss), he had talked himself into thinking that he would play it as a good soldier, obeying without question the orders of his Commander-in-Chief. "Welcome to France!" he had said bravely.

"Oh, you darling little pudgy little man," Ms. Strydent had said. "Are those somewhat ratty-looking roses for me?" She had then extended her hand to be kissed and that had been too much.

"No," the ambassador, suddenly losing control, had replied. "They're not."

"Then who are they for?" Ms. Strydent had demanded to know, somewhat warily.

"For whomever this is," the ambassador said, thrusting the roses into the arms of Senator George H. Kamikaze.

"Actually," the senator replied, "I am Senator George H. Kamikaze."

"You're kidding!" the ambassador said.

“That’s once,” the senator said. “Say it twice more and you get to eat the roses!”

“And he’s not kidding, either, chubby,” Wesley St. James said. “I can’t wait to get back home so I can tell our Beloved Leader what this guy did to me.”

“You don’t say,” the ambassador said.

“I do, too, say,” Wesley St. James said. “He pulled Jujitsu on me, threw me to the floor, and made me eat my toupee. That sort of thing just isn’t done to the King of Daytime Drama. You just wait till I tell Jimmy. He’ll fix your wagon!”

“Let’s get right down to business,” Shur-lee Strydent said. “After all, we are here at the request of our Beloved Leader. I trust this singer who I have graciously permitted to share the billing with me is all packed and ready to go?”

“The lady, so to speak,” the senator explained, “is making reference, in her quaint patois and abominable diction, to Mr. Korsky-Rimsakov.”

“I have been unable to communicate with him,” the ambassador replied.

“Well, see to it instantly,” Shur-lee Strydent said. “A superstar like myself is not accustomed to waiting around for little people. And while you’re doing that, I wish to grace the Royal Abzugian Embassy with a visit.”

“I’m afraid that’s out of the question,” the ambassador said.

“You’re not actually telling me I can’t do something I want to do!”

“The area in the vicinity of the Royal Abzugian Embassy has been declared a disaster zone by the French government,” the ambassador said.

“You don’t seem to understand, little pudgy little man,” Shur-lee Strydent said, “that you are talking to the superstar’s superstar. What the French government says or does not say doesn’t matter in the least so far as Shur-lee Strydent is concerned. Now summon me a limousine!”

“I don’t have one,” the ambassador confessed. “At least one where there is a fair chance of you being able to get through the door. But I’ll tell you what I do have.”

“What’s that?”

“A slug for the telephone,” the ambassador said. “You can call the Abzugian Embassy and ask them to send their limousine for you. They have dozens of them, not like some embassies I know.”

“See to it, Wesley,” Ms. Strydent said. “Telephone there and speak with their ambassador, El Noil Snoil the Magnificent. Tell him that if he sends a limousine for me, and doesn’t tell Darling Seanikins that I’m coming, I’ll sing ‘Over the Rainbow’ for him alone.”

“I have to avail myself of telephonic communication myself,” Senator Kamikaze said. “Where might I find such a device intended for the use of the public?”

“Do you always talk like that, Senator?” the ambassador asked.

“If you mean do I customarily express my thoughts with conciseness and grammatical perfection, the reply to your interrogatory is in the affirmative.”

“You’re kidding!”

“That’s twice,” the senator replied.

“There’s a pay phone over there,” the ambassador said, pointing. Both Wesley St. James and the senator set out for the phone booth simultaneously. The senator not only reached it first, but, after straight-arming Mr. St. James, who seemed to be trying to use it first, was the first to drop his coin in the slot and put the device to work.

Meanwhile, traveling behind motorcycle escort, the Cadillac Seville bearing His Royal Highness Prince Hassan, Bobby-Sue/Brunhilde Roberts, and Trapper John McIntyre raced through the Place de 1’Opera, and skidded to a halt by the stage door to the Paris Opera itself. Trapper John’s suggestion that they stop by Harry’s Bar for a little snort to cut the dust had either not been understood or had been ignored by the chauffeur.

“What the hell,” he said. “There is probably something to drink in Boris’s dressing room.”

And so there was, it being a contractual provision of the maestro’s arrangement with the French National Opera that his dressing room be equipped, at all times, with chilled champagne, an extensive list of whiskey and brandy, and Fenstermacher’s finest Milwaukee pale pilsner on tap.

“Can I offer you something, Bobby-Sue?” Trapper John asked, as he drew a foaming glass of Fenstermacher’s from the tap.

“Ordinarily, no,” Bobby-Sue replied. “But under these circumstances, perhaps a little—no more than three fingers—of that Courvoisier.”

“Three fingers of Courvoisier?” Trapper John asked, surprised.

“I told you, Doctor, I know everything there is to know about Maestro Korsky-Rimsakov. If ‘Cher Boris,’ as I believe he is known in these parts, takes three fingers of Courvoisier to, as he so charmingly puts it, clear the pipes, it certainly behooves me to follow in his path.”

“Whatever you say,” Trapper John said, and poured cognac in a glass for her. His eyes widened as she drank it at a draught. Her face turned crimson, tears rolled down her cheeks, and she made loud gasping noises.

“Are you all right, Bobby-Sue?”

It took her a full minute to get her voice back, and then she replied.

“It will take some getting used to,” she admitted. “That was the first cognac that ever passed my lips. But I am willing to make whatever sacrifices are required so that I may sing, *en duet,* with Cher Boris!”

“You don’t know what you’re saying!” Trapper John said, shocked.

“Just remember who gave her the cognac, that’s all!” His Royal Highness said.

The pain having passed, Bobby-Sue was suddenly in a very good mood.

“Isn’t this a *darling* dressing room!” she said. “Not quite as luxurious as I would expect for Cher Boris, but not bad.” She sort of skipped around the room, which was furnished, except for a Japanese-manufactured high-fidelity system and an American-made chair into which the maestro was fond of slumping with his feet high in the air, entirely with furniture from the “Priceless Collection” of the Louvre. She paused momentarily to examine first one and then another of the etchings on the wall.

“I think I must be tiddly,” she said, giggling a little as she leaned on the wall for support.

“What makes you say that?” Trapper John asked.

“Not only am I just a little dizzy,” Bobby-Sue confessed, “but my eyes are playing tricks on me. If I didn’t know better, I would think that those etchings are absolutely obscene!”

“Perish the thought,” Trapper John said. “It’s the booze.”

“I would certainly hope so!” Bobby-Sue said. She sort of skipped into the other room, which was the maestro’s place of repose, as he thought of it.

“Oh, this is darling, too!” she said. “And isn’t that clever—a mirror on the ceiling over the bed! So that he can practice the death scene of *le*

*moro di Venezia*, I know."

"How clever of you to figure that out," Trapper John said. "I'd hate to tell you why some people think he put it there."

"I am so happy just *being* here," Bobby-Sue said, hanging on to the bedpost for a little support, "that I must sing."

"That doesn't surprise me," Trapper John said. "What are you going to sing for us?"

"Oh, I don't know," Bobby-Sue said. "Something simple," She paused thoughtfully. "Oh, I know. Violetta's aria, *'In core scolpiti ho quegli accenti'** the finale of Act One of *La Traviata."* She took in a deep breath and started to do just that.

*(* "Could It Be He Who Stirred My Heart.")*

Dr. J. F. X. McIntyre listened carefully, with a growing frown.

"Damn," he said. "I knew it. She *can* sing!"

At that precise moment the telephone in the Louis XIV *boite de chambre* in the bedchamber of Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov began to ring.

The bed was occupied by four merry revelers, but not in the precise mixture of the genders those who knew the maestro would expect. They were all the same gender, thus were all fully clothed, and they were all laughing heartily between pulls at jeroboams of Piper Heidsieck '69.

"Even the timing was perfect," Boris said. "I got them with the bucket of dishwater before Abdullah hit them with the bag from the vacuum cleaner! That made it stick all over them!"

"I got mine," Dr. T. Mullins Yancey said with quiet pride, "—the one with the beat-up hat—when he still had his mouth open!"

"There goes the goddamn phone," His Royal Highness Sheikh Abdullah ben Abzug said.

"I haven't had so much fun since the time we turned the fire hose on the WCTU Men's Auxiliary Convention on Bourbon Street," Colonel Jean-Pierre de la Chevaux said.

"There goes the goddamn phone," His Royal Highness repeated.

"You have to give them credit for tenacity," Boris said. "They just won't take no for an answer. But I'll tell you this, it'll be a cold day in hell before I give in!"

"There goes the goddamn phone," His Highness repeated again, and this time when it became apparent to him that none of the others were

interested, he crawled off the bed, found the *boit de chambre,* and picked up the telephone.

"Up yours," he said.

"I beg your pardon?" asked a voice with impeccable diction.

"Your mother wears army shoes," His Highness replied.

"May I speak with Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov, please?" the caller said. "Senator George H. Kamikaze speaking."

"El Noil Snoil," His Highness said, switching to English, "it's for you."

"I'm not taking any calls," Boris announced. "Especially not now." He looked toward the door. "Hi, girls," he said. "How was the shower? Are you all fresh and ready?"

"Last one in's an old maid!" Dr. T. Mullins Yancey cried out, sitting up and holding out his arms in a gesture of welcome.

"Boris," Colonel de la Chevaux said, "you better answer it. It's the really private number."

"Another insidious conspiracy to deprive me of my simple pleasure!" Boris said, plaintively, but took the telephone from His Royal Highness. "Whoever this is, I wish you would call back in, say, half an hour. Something's come up."

"This is Senator George H. Kamikaze," the senator said.

"You're kidding!"

"That's once," the senator said. "You possibly remember me, sir, and I would hazard the guess that you are now experiencing some pangs of curiosity vis-à-vis how I came to have in my possession your unlisted telephone number."

"That thought did run through my mind," Boris replied. "And the only reason I am being patient with you is that I recall you are acquainted with my beloved baby sister."

"Your memory serves you precisely," the senator said. "And it was from that gracious and charming lady that I acquired your telephone number."

"No problem," Boris said. "I'll have a word with her and have the number changed."

"I have a personal communication from your sibling, sir," the senator said, "which I would like to deliver as quickly as possible and in person."

“You’re kidding!”

“That’s twice,” the senator said. “It is my intention, sir, to deliver the aforementioned message in person and as soon as this can possibly be arranged.”

“You’ve got a personal message from my baby sister?” Boris asked.

“That is the essence of what I have previously stated.” The other telephone in the room began to ring.

“There goes the goddamn phone,” His Royal Highness announced.

“Answer that, Horsey, will you? I’ve got Senator Kamikaze on the line.”

“You’re kidding!” Horsey replied.

“I heard that!” the senator said. “But since you didn’t say it, that only makes two and a half!”

“Answer the goddamn phone, Horsey,” Boris said.

“Not me!” Horsey said, horror in his voice. “Let Doc Yancey answer it. If anybody saw him with it in his hand, he could say it was an anatomical specimen.”

“Doc, please answer the phone!” Boris said.

“Oh, isn’t that darling!” Monique said.

“Maestro, may I presume to call upon you at your apartment, bearing the aforesaid message from your sibling?” the senator asked.

“This is my turn with Boris,” Angelique said, dropping her towel. *“1* won’t need that thing!”

“Senator,” Boris said, “it would be a little inconvenient, frankly, to receive you here just now.”

“Hey, Boris, it’s for you,” Dr. Yancey replied. “Some guy with a voice like a goosed canary wants to talk to El Noil Snoil the Magnificent.”

“See what he wants, Doc,” Boris said. “I’m still talking to the senator.”

“Frankly, Maestro,” the senator said, “your sister was cognizant of the possibility that you would possibly find a visit inconvenient. She said I was to tell you you had to see me.”

“Oh, I’d *love* to see you, Senator,” Boris said. “It’s just that your coming here right now would be a little inconvenient.”

“Well, where can we meet?” the senator asked.

“How about the bar in the Dorchester Hotel in London a week from Monday?” Boris replied.

“Today, Maestro,” the senator said. “I think I should make you aware that I am empowered by your sister, in the event you cannot find time in your busy schedule to meet with me, to give an eight-by-ten glossy photograph of you to *Opera News.”*

“They already have hundreds, thousands of my photographs,” Boris replied.

“Not of you laying naked on a polar bear rug playing with a rubber duck, they don’t,” the senator replied.

“Oh, my God,” Boris said. “She wouldn’t. You wouldn’t!”

“She did and I would,” the senator replied.

“I’ll meet you immediately at my dressing suite at the Paris Opera,” Boris said. “Just don’t let that photograph get out of your hands!”

He slammed the telephone in its cradle. “Put the towel back on, Angelique,” he said. “I must now go and make one more sacrifice to preserve the good name of grand opera generally and Korsky-Rimsakov specifically. Perhaps later!”

“Oh, Maestro!” Angelique said. “It’s my turn. Monique, Jeanine, and Jacqueline have had their turn!”

“So the ball bounces,” Boris solemnly intoned. “If Lady Luck had so willed, you would have gotten first crack at me when you drew lots. Don’t be a sore loser. I simply cannot abide sore losers.”

“You want to take this, Boris?” Dr. Yancey said, extending the rather oddly shaped telephone to him.

“God, I’d hate to tell you what you look like with that thing in your hand,” Boris said. “No, I don’t want to take it. It would look as if I were narcissistic. You just hold it to my ear.”

Dr. Yancey did as he was told. Colonel de la Chevaux laughed.

“What’s so funny, you overstuffed Cajun?” Boris snarled.

“Take a look in the mirror,” Horsey said. Boris did.

“Oh, God!” he moaned.

“You can put it in my ear if you want to,” Angelique said.

“You’re just like those lousy Russians,” Boris snapped. “You won’t take no for an answer!” He covered his eyes with his hands so that he wouldn’t have to see his reflection in the mirror. “El Noil Snoil the Magnificent speaking,” he said in Abzugian, a tongue consisting in the main of grunts, groans, and sneezes, with a belchlike sound for emphasis.

“Jesus H. Christ!” Wesley St. James chirped. “What the hell was that?”

“That was Abzugian, you couthless oaf. Who are you and what do you want?”

“This is Wesley St. James, the well-known—one might even say world-famous—King of Daytime Drama. I am calling on behalf of Ms. Shur-lee Strydent.”

“You wouldn’t dare!” Boris replied.

“Am I speaking with El Noil Snoil the Magnificent, Defender of the Faithful, and under whose diplomatic immunity is Sean O’Casey O’Mulligan?”

“Yes, you are,” Boris said. “But make it quick—I’ve got to get out of here.”

“I’m calling to inform you, sir, that Ms. Shur-lee Strydent has graciously decided to honor your embassy with her presence. And Ms. Strydent would be most grateful if her visit came as a surprise to Mr. O’Mulligan.”

Boris said something naughty and pushed the telephone away from his head.

“I wonder why people get so upset when you say that to them, Boris,” Dr. Yancey said. “You don’t have to be a sex expert such as myself to know that it’s physiologically and anatomically impossible.”

“That was for you, O’Mulligan,” Boris said. “That ugly lady friend of yours is on her way over here.”

“Shur-lee Strydent? On her way here?”

“Indeed. And if you were anything but an ill-mannered Irish house guest, you’d give her what she wants and get her off my back.” He jumped out of bed and started to dress.

“That’s an awful thing to even suggest!” Dr. Yancey said. “Shame on you, Boris!”

Sean O’Casey O’Mulligan began to weep.

“Oh, for Christ’s sake, stop that!” Boris said. “If there’s one thing I can’t stand, it’s a full-grown Irishman crying!”

“Then take me with you!” Sean O’Casey O’Mulligan said. “I beg you, Boris, in the name of decency, don’t leave me here to face that thing alone!”

“That *would* be beastly of me, wouldn’t it?” Boris said thoughtfully. “Very well, put your pants on and be quick about it!”

“What about us?” Monique, Angelique, Jeanine, and Jacqueline asked all at once.

“You’ll just have to make do with Doctor Yancey and Abdullah,” Boris said. He turned to his liaison officer, Lieutenant Antoine de la Foret of the Gendarmerie Na- tionale. “Call up the Armored Personnel Carrier,” he said. “Mr. O’Mulligan, Horsey, and I are off to the opera!”

“Your every wish, Maestro,” the lieutenant said, is my command!”

“I know,” Boris said. “Get going!”

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## *Chapter Fifteen*

As the M-113 armored personnel carrier of the VIP Protection Detachment of the Gendarmerie Nationale clanked up in a cloud of blue smoke under the balcony of Maestro Korsky-Rimsakov's apartment, so the singer and his party could descend by knotted rope to enter it, the little convoy bearing His Eminence Archbishop John Joseph Mulcahy, Monsignor Pancho de Malaga y de Villa, the Reverend Born-Again Bob Roberts, and Dr. Benjamin Franklin "Hawkeye" Pierce came racing down the Boulevard de la Grande Armee, blue lights flashing, whoopers whooping, and, most importantly, with the silk embroidered flag of the Sheikhdom of Hussid flapping briskly on the right front fender of the Cadillac Seville.

Despite a certain suspicion that so small an automobile could be carrying anyone of real importance, the Gendarmerie on the scene decided to give the benefit of the doubt to the flag of Hussid. After all, if the Hussids were piqued with the French, there would be an instant decline, in the amount of 38 percent, of the petroleum available to la Belle France. The gendarmes cleared a path for the convoy.

The first man out of the car was the archbishop. He looked up as Boris slid down the knotted rope from the balcony.

"I'll be damned," Boris said. "Dago Red!"

"You probably will," the archbishop agreed. "What's going on here?"

"It's a long story," Boris said, as he disappeared through the hatch of the personnel carrier. "And I just don't have the time to tell it right now. I'm on my way to preserve the good name of one of the great opera stars of all time."

Another man slid down the rope, a face the archbishop seemed to recall having seen somewhere.

"And a good day to you, Father," he said in an unmistakable Irish brogue as he entered the personnel carrier through the hatch on top.

And then Horsey appeared and slid down the rope.

“And how are you today, Your Eminence?” he asked, just before he disappeared inside the personnel carrier and the hatch clanged shut after him. Belching blue smoke, its siren screaming, its tracks tearing up the pavement, the armored personnel carrier set forth up the Boulevard de la Grand Armee toward the Arc de Triomphe de L’Etoile.

The archbishop jumped back in the car. “Follow that tank!” he ordered.

Traffic around the edifice known as the Arc de Triomphe, which sits on sort of a hill at the top of the Avenue de la Champs-Elysees, flows in a counterclockwise direction. As the armored personnel carrier, the motorcycle outriders, the Citroëns carrying the bodyguard, and the Cadillac Seville moved, so to speak, from noon till nine, a 1948 Cadillac flower car (a hearselike vehicle used normally to carry floral tributes to the late lamented from the funeral home to the cemetery) moved, so to speak, from six o’clock toward three o’clock. It was all that Hertz could come up with on such short notice in response to Mr. Wesley St. James’s demand for the most suitable vehicle they had to transport the superstar’s superstar. The French are well known for the ingenuity and imagination they can display once they hear the magic words “price is no object.” The vehicle in question was ordered to Orly while it was en route from a funeral home to a cemetery. There was a small problem at the beginning, when some cars in the funeral cortege simply kept following the flower car when it made an abrupt right turn off the Boulevard de Sainte Michele, but the driver, rising to the challenge, managed to shake most of them before he got to Orly by running stop lights and going the wrong way down one-way streets.

No more than half a dozen cars still followed the flower car when it pulled up before Air Force One, and Ms. Strydent, far from thinking that anything was out of place, naturally presumed that the flowers were intended for her and that the people in the cars following were simply members of her fan club. It was well known, of course, that the French cried at the drop of a hat.

She climbed into the flower car with Mr. St. James and they set out for the Boulevard de la Grande Armee and her darling Seanikins. As they moved through town, she became aware that she had been recognized. People were staring at her.

“Start handing me flowers,” she ordered Wesley St. James. “I can’t let my adoring public down!” Wesley St. James immediately began

disassembling the floral tributes.

Alternately throwing kisses, forget-me-nots, and lilies of the valley to the hordes of fans, she was so caught up in what she interpreted to be the adoration of her fans that she didn't even notice the armored personnel carrier going the other way around the Arc de Triomphe.

Suddenly, the flower car skidded to a halt.

"What are we stopping for?" Ms. Strydent demanded somewhat sharply.

"This is the Royal Abzugian Embassy," the chauffeur said. A gendarme rushed up.

"What's going on here?"

"I am Shur-lee Strydent herself!" Ms. Strydent announced. "I am here to see His Excellency El Noil Snoil the Magnificent!"

"He just left," the gendarme said.

"Hey, Abdullah," an unmistakably American voice called out. "You want to see something funny? Get a load of the ugly broad in the flower car!"

Ms. Strydent looked up and saw Dr. T. Mullins Yancey on the balcony.

"Yoo-hoo," she called. "Funny little man with freckles! I'm looking for Sean O'Casey O'Mulligan."

"You're out of luck," Dr. Yancey called down. "He just left."

"You don't happen to know where Darling Seanikins went, do you, funny little man with freckles?"

"Hey, are you Shur-lee Strydent?" Dr. Yancey inquired.

"Who else could I possibly be?" she replied modestly.

"Who else indeed?" Dr. Yancey said. "I hope this won't ruin your whole day, lady, but I had the feeling he left because he didn't want to see you."

"Oh, my," Shur-lee said. "Darling Seanikins just couldn't bring himself to believe that I was really coming. Tell me, Freckles, what about some singer named Korsky-Borsky or something like that?"

"What about him?"

"I have graciously agreed to permit him to appear with me in Moscow," she said. "Is he there?"

"Boris regrets a previous engagement," Dr. Yancey said. "He won't be going to Moscow."

“Well, I can understand that,” she said. “No one in their right mind wants to be in a position where their talent might be compared to mine. Be a darling little man, Freckles, and tell Darling Seanikins that I’ll drop by again on my way home from my triumphal tour of Russia.”

“My pleasure,” Dr. Yancey said.

“Back to the airport, chauffeur,” Ms. Strydent ordered. “And drive slowly this time, so that my fans can get a good look at me!”

By the time this had taken place, the armored personnel carrier had traveled down the full length of the Champs-Elysees, sent cars and pedestrians scattering as it passed through the Place de la Concorde, narrowly missed the Battle of Waterloo Monument in the Place Vendome, and finally skidded to a halt by the stage door of the Paris Opera.

Senator George H. Kamikaze had arrived moments before and been shown to the dressing room of Maestro Korsky-Rimsakov by one of the guards. He had just raised a glass of Fenstermacher’s finest old Milwaukee pale pilsner to his lips when Boris strode into the room.

“Senator Kamikaze, I presume?” he said. “I can tell by that ridiculous hat.”

“Maestro Korsky-Rimsakov, I presume?” the senator said. “I can tell by the whiskey breath by which you are preceded by a good ten yards.”

“Hark!” Boris said, suddenly sharply, cocking his head to one side.

A woman’s singing voice could now be heard: “For love, like tender flowers, is swiftly dead and gone. My friends, embrace this alluring occasion. Let’s revel and laugh until dawn!”

“You’ve deceived me, you miserable Machiavellian Oriental!” Boris said. He picked the senator up. “You didn’t tell me that my beloved baby sister was with you!”

“Put me down before I turn you into the fattest soprano in the world,” the senator said. “Your sister is in San Francisco!”

“Are you trying to tell me, you sawed-off refugee from a sukiyaki joint, that I, the world’s greatest male opera singer, cannot tell the voice of the world’s greatest female opera singer, who just happens to be my beloved baby sister, when I hear it?”

“If he won’t,” Trapper John said, “I will, Old Bull Bellow. Now put the senator down before he loses his Oriental patience and makes good his threat about turning you into a soprano.”

“Silence!” Boris said. “While that great artist, my baby sister, is singing!” He listened, enraptured, to the singing. Bobby-Sue, unaware that anyone at all was listening to her, had started to sing from the end of Act Three.

“Come here beside me and listen, Beloved Alfredo! Dearest, on this medallion, you see a past resemblance to keep as a remembrance of her who loved you so.”*

*(* All of this, of course, was sung in Italian, the way Giuseppe Verdi wrote it. It has been translated in deference to that minuscule portion of readers who are neither fluent in Italian, nor, believe it or not, opera lovers.)*

“By God!” Boris said fervently. “I’ve heard her sing that a hundred times. But never like that! She’s apparently getting better with middle age!” He put Senator Kamikaze down, put his hand on his chest, took a deep breath, and began to sing Alfredo’s reply to Violetta, in Violetta’s death-bed scene.

“You must not die, but live for me. No, you shall live believing Almighty God would never make me sustain such anguish, such hopeless grieving.”

As he was singing, Archbishop Mulcahy and Hawkeye came in, carrying the Reverend Born-Again Bob between them. The archbishop, who, of course, spoke Italian and was an opera lover, was instantly on the alert.

“Is that Bobby-Sue?” he asked of Trapper John.

“Prelate of the Church or not, Dago Red,” Boris hissed fiercely, “shut your fat mouth while two great artists are singing, even if only to each other!”

From the dressing room, Bobby-Sue/Violetta replied to Boris/Alfredo: “Someday you’ll learn to love again! One who will give her heart to you!”

As she sang, Boris ran into his dressing room.

“I was afraid of that!” the archbishop said. “She’s probably using the bed under that mirror on the ceiling as her death bed!” He let go of Brother Born-Again Bob’s feet and dashed to the door. Hawkeye let the other end down and rushed after him.

Bobby-Sue finished her aria, and Boris started his: “God will not part us now, so close to happiness. Death must not thus tear you away from

me!”

The archbishop’s worst fears were realized. Bobby-Sue was indeed using Boris’s bed under the mirror on the ceiling as her death bed, and as the last syllables of Alfredo’s aria died away, after rattling all the crystal chandeliers in the building, he flung himself on the bed, on top of her, and wept as if heartbroken.

“All right!” the archbishop snapped. “That’s enough of that! Get off the bed, Boris!”

Boris raised his head from where it had been resting on Bobby-Sue’s splendiferous breastworks and looked at the prelate with curiosity.

“Something for you, Dago Red?” he asked.

“You heard me! Get off that sweet, innocent, and, if I may say so, superbly stacked young woman!”

“That’s the trouble with you clergypersons,” Boris said. “All you think about is sex, sex, sex! When I’ll have you know, Dago Red, that this superb artist on whose bosom I have just rested my head is an opera singer, and we have other things on our minds, don’t we, my dear, than sex, sex, sex!”

“Maestro,” Bobby-Sue asked timidly, “you mean you approve of my singing?”

“Approve of it? Approve of it? My dear, you are worthy of *me*, that’s how much I approve of it!”

“Oh, Maestro! How happy you’ve made me!”

“You don’t have to call me maestro,” Boris said. “You may call me ‘Boris,’ as one great artist to another. And what is your name, my little nightingale?”

“Bobby-Sue,” Bobby-Sue said.

Boris looked at her for a moment. “Not anymore, it isn’t,” he said. “From this moment onward, you are Brunhilde Whatever-you-said-your-last-name-was.”

Boris bounded over to Senator Kamikaze, picked him off the floor, and kissed him wetly in the middle of his forehead.

“Can you ever forgive me? I should have known that if my beloved baby sister sent you to see me, it was to carry a gift! And what a gift!”

“There is one little thing you can do for me,” the senator said. “In addition to putting me down.”

“Name it!” Boris said. “Anyone who has made such a contribution to grand opera as you have, putting Brunhilde What’s-her-name together with me can have anything it is in the power of Boris Alexandrovich Korsky-Rimsakov to grant!”

(The others, of course, were well aware that the senator had had absolutely nothing to do with bringing Bobby-Sue to Paris, but this was another of those times when correcting the maestro seemed to be ill-advised.)

“How would you like to go to Russia and sing?” the senator said.

“Not on your life,” Boris said immediately. “God, the moment you think that perhaps there is one politician whose soul is not as corrupt as the others’, they slap you in the face with an indecent proposal like that!”

“The President of the United States wants you to do it as a special favor to him,” Senator Kamikaze said.

“You see? You see? He shamelessly admits it!” Boris said.

“Boris,” Brunhilde said.

“Yes, my dear?”

“I saw in *Opera News* that the Leningrad Opera is doing *La Traviata* tonight.”

“And?”

“I thought perhaps you might wish to sing Alfredo against another Violetta, so that you would have a better chance to judge my voice.”

“That is absolutely unnecessary,” the maestro said firmly. “I have already judged your remarkable talents. But you may have something. Leningrad is doing *La Traviata,* you say?”

“Yes, they are.”

“Hassan, get on the phone to the Russian Embassy and tell them I will sing Alfredo tonight. To Brunhilde’s Violetta, of course.”

“But, Boris, I’m not prepared!” Bobby-Sue/Brunhilde said.

“If I say you’re prepared, you’re prepared,” he said. “And besides, a smashing triumph in Russia will do wonders for your career.”

As Prince Hassan reached for the telephone to call the Russian Embassy, the instrument rang. The prince answered it and then handed it to Senator Kamikaze.

“For you, Senator,” he said.

“No kidding?” the senator said. “Senator Kamikaze here.”

The familiar piercing voice filled the room.

“You have exactly ninety seconds to get here before I leave for Moscow,” Ms. Shur-lee Strydent announced.

“You mean you’d leave without me?” the senator asked.

“You better believe it,” Ms. Strydent said.

*“Vaya con Dios,”* the senator replied.

“How dare you use language like that on me!” Ms. Strydent replied. “You just wait till I tell our Beloved Leader what you said! He’ll fix you, you dirty old Republican!” And with that she hung up.

“Senator,” Boris said. “Perhaps I have misjudged you after all.”

“If we are going to Leningrad, Maestro, it would well behoove us to commence the journey,” the senator replied.

Four days later, the ambassador of the workers and peasants of the U.S.S.R. to the oppressed workers, peasants, and farmers of the USA gave his mouth a final blast of Breath-B-Gone (he had had a little snort to give him courage to face the Washington traffic) and climbed out of his Rolls-Royce under the west portico of a large white building on Pennsylvania Avenue.

The chief of protocol greeted him. He slapped <u>him</u> playfully on the back, pumped his hand, and said, “How y’all today? Looks like we might get a little rain, don’t it?”

“I believe that I am expected,” the ambassador said.

“You sure are,” the chief of protocol said. “Jim-Boy’s right inside waiting for you.”

The ambassador was carrying a large pot. The chief of Protocol lifted the lid. “No offense, of course, but you understand. We just can’t have anybody blowing up our Beloved Leader, can we?” He sniffed at the contents. “Jesus, what the hell is that stuff?”

“It is a present to your Beloved Leader from the wife of our Beloved Leader,” the ambassador said. “It was flown in this morning.”

“Well, that’s right nice of her, I’m sure,” the chief of protocol said, “worrying about whether the President’s pigs are getting enough to eat.”

“That’s borscht, you moron!”

“Whatever you say, Mr. Ambassador. I got strict orders from Jim-Boy hisself not to let you guys get under my skin. But I will tell you this—anybody carrying a bucket of that stuff around on purpose is in no position to be calling anybody else a moron.”

“Can we go in now?”

“Right this way,” the chief of protocol said.

The incumbent, when the ambassador entered the Oval Office, was sitting behind the highly polished desk. He rose to his feet when he saw the ambassador. There was a yelp of pain, seeming to come from under the desk. “Watch the fingers, for God’s sake!”

“Did you say something, Mr. President?”

“Not yet,” Jim-Boy said. “Come on in, Mr. Ambassador. Sit down and have a boiled peanut.” Jim-Boy sniffed. “What the heck is that awful smell?”

“It’s a little present, Jim-Boy, for you,” the chief of protocol said. “From the Chairman’s wife.”

“Oh, really?” Jim-Boy said.

“Permit me to give you this small gift from the Chairman’s wife,” the ambassador said.

“Thanks a lot,” Jim-Boy said. He lifted the lid, sniffed, and made a face. “I must tell you in all honesty, Mr. Ambassador,” he said—“and I never lie, you know, not even to Russians—that this is a surprise.”

“How do you mean?”

“All the reports I’ve been getting tell me that not only did this Korsky-Borsky or whatever guy sing in Russia, but he brought the house down.”

“That is true, Mr. President,” the ambassador said.

“And I also heard that he brought another American singer with him, and that she also brought the house down.”

“That is also true.”

“I just knew you-all would love Shur-lee Strydent,” Jim-Boy said.

“The singer who brought the house down was Brunhilde Roberts,” the ambassador said. “But no matter, your information is correct. With certain minor little exceptions, the performance of Comrade Korsky-Rimsakov and Comrade Roberts was all that we could ask for.”

“Then how come you’ve brought me a bucket of hog swill?”

“That’s *borscht,* Mr. President.”

“What did he say?” the President replied, sotto voce.

“Borscht,” a voice from beneath the desk said. “It’s sort of beet soup.”

“No fooling?”

“Yeah, they eat it all the time. It’s what you call ethnic.”

“Got it,” Jim-Boy said. He leaned forward and pushed a button on his intercom.

“Yes, Daddy?” a faint voice replied.

“Be a darling, darling, and tell your mommy to make up a doggie bag full of grits and chitlings right away. We’re going to send it to Russia.”

“Yes, Daddy,” the voice replied.

“You were telling me you were pleased with the singers we sent you,” Jim-Boy said.

“I said with ‘minor little exceptions,’ ” the ambassador replied.

“Such as, for example?”

“Well, the Chairman didn’t like it one little bit when that Japanese fellow in the funny hat came on stage during intermission and started talking about free enterprise,” the ambassador said.

“Well, all those Republicans are like that,” Jim-Boy said. “Always saying things nobody wants to hear. Your audience should have understood that and not gotten mad.”

“Oh, they weren’t mad,” the ambassador said. “They whistled and cheered and stamped their feet, they liked it so much. That’s what made the Chairman mad.”

“Well, you just tell him I said he must have people in his government that he can’t control either,” Jim-Boy said.

“Oh, he does, he does!” the ambassador said.

“He does?” a surprised voice came from beneath the desk.

“That’s what I said, he does. And that’s one of the things I’d like to talk about, Mr. President.”

“Shoot,” Jim-Boy said.

“The Chairman said to tell you that he likes a practical joke as well as the next man,” the ambassador said. “And he also said he’s sure you would understand how they sometimes get out of hand.”

“I don’t follow you,” Jim-Boy said.

“Shur-lee Strydent,” the ambassador said.

“What about her?”

“Well, the Chairman said to tell you that he laughed just as hard as anybody when Air Force One arrived in Moscow and that ugly woman got off and announced that you had sent her and that she was the world’s greatest singer.”

“He thought that was funny, did he?” Jim-Boy said coldly.

“He certainly did,” the ambassador said. “He ‘laughed till he cried’ is the way he put it. But you remember what I said about jokes, even great jokes, sometimes getting out of hand?”

“Yeah, I remember you said that,” Jim-Boy said coldly.

“Well, you won’t believe this, Mr. President, but the Comrade Chairman of the Secret Police didn’t think it was funny.”

“He didn’t?”

“No, he didn’t. You may find this hard to believe, Mr. President, but he said she was the best singer he ever heard.”

“And you, Mr. Ambassador,” Jim-Boy said, “may find this hard to believe, but I agree with him!”

“I beg your pardon? Are you pulling my leg?”

“No, I’m not pulling your leg,” Jim-Boy said. “And the next time somebody pulls on my leg, I’m going to step on both his hands!”

“Well, then, watch what you’re saying!” the voice from beneath the desk said.

“I keep hearing voices,” the ambassador said.

“It’s your imagination, that’s all,” Jim-Boy said. “We were talking about Shur-lee Strydent, I believe.”

“The Comrade Chairman of the Secret Police wants to make a little deal with you,” the ambassador said.

“Let’s hear it.”

“You let him keep Shur-lee Strydent, and he’ll give you his personal word of honor that you can have Wesley St. James back.”

“Back? Back from where?”

“Siberia.”

“What’s he doing in Siberia?”

“That’s where the court sent him.”

“For what?”

“For defiling the Soviet airwaves with sadism, perversion, and obscenity, that’s what!”

“How did he do that?”

“He smuggled a tape in, that’s how he did it. And bribed a previously reliable employee of Radio Moscow to play it.”

“A dirty tape?”

“You wouldn’t believe it. Something called ‘Life’s Little Agonies, Part II.’ ”

“They’ve got us cold, Jim-Boy,” the voice from beneath the desk said.

“Yeah, I know,” Jim-Boy said. “The little woman watches it every day.”

“Well, Mr. President?”

“How does Ms. Strydent feel about staying?” Jim-Boy asked.

“She’s all for it,” the ambassador said. “At least until she finds somebody called Darling Seanikins.”

“Who?”

“All I know about him is that she thinks he’s hiding somewhere in my beloved motherland.”

“And is he?”

“Just between you, me, and whomever it is under the desk, no. He left Leningrad with the others.”

“Well, then,” Jim-Boy said, “what she doesn’t know won’t hurt her, will it?”

“You’re a pleasure to do business with, Mr. President.”

“And just to prove my heart’s in the right place, Mr. Ambassador, you can keep Wesley St. James,” Jim-Boy said.

“You can’t do that!” the voice under the desk said.

“Don’t tell me what I can or can’t do!” Jim-Boy said.

“There’s just one more thing, Mr. President,” the ambassador said. He laid a bill on the President’s desk.

“What’s that?”

“It’s a bill.”

“A bill for what?”

“A bill for the super deluxe, bound in genuine simulated leather, fully illustrated edition of the complete works of Karl Marx. In your somewhat devalued currency, it comes to $908.72, plus tax, of course.”

“Why are you giving it to me?”

“Why, your two closest personal friends told the Chairman himself you’d like nothing in the world more, that it was something they figured you’d always wanted.”

“What two personal friends was that?”

“The ones called Hawkeye and Trapper John,” the ambassador said. “I’d be happy to take either your personal check or your American Express, whichever is more convenient.”

“Well, you can’t say Kamikaze didn’t warn you about those two,” the voice from under the desk said.

Jim-Boy brought out his checkbook, a special deluxe version, the checks of which offered a neat little sketch of downtown Plains, Georgia, at high noon, and made one out.

“And now I’ve got a little present for you,” he said, as the ambassador put the check in his pocket.

“My cup runneth over,” the ambassador replied.

“Amy, Miss Lillian!” he called. “You can come in now and sing for this Russian fellow.”

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